United Nations A/S-19/PV.5

# General Assembly
Nineteenth Session

*Official Records*

5th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 25 June 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

*President*: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Tribute to the memory of Mr. Jacques-Yves Cousteau**

**The President:** I have the sad duty to inform the Assembly that Mr. Jacques-Yves Cousteau passed away last night at Paris. I say this with a sad heart, recognizing him as one of the giants of our time, who was genuinely committed to promoting the welfare of the planet, to the environment and to understanding the multifaceted aspects of the environment as well as the intricate connections of the environment to development, to human activities, and to the cosmology as a whole.

At the same time, I realize how fitting it is that we are here and that I am able to break the sad news of Mr. Cousteau's death at this gathering, where we are trying our best as Governments, non-governmental organizations and other interested parties and stake-holders to promote sustainable development and enhance the environment.

I now give the floor to the Minister of the Environment of France.

**Mrs. Voynet** (France) (*interpretation from French*): Jacques-Yves Cousteau was undoubtedly the best-known Frenchman in the world. He was famous for his lifelong struggle to safeguard the marine environment and the environment in general. Today we are, of course, saddened. But we are convinced that the best tribute that could be paid Jacques-Yves Cousteau would be to make sure that in the future France as a whole became renowned throughout the world for its work for sustainable development. In this respect, I am committed to working so that that dimension of our activities predominates in the years to come.

**Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (Article 19 of the Charter) (A/S-19/20/Add.1)**

**The President:** In a letter contained in document A/S-19/20/Add.1, the Secretary-General informs me that since the issuance of document A/S-19/20 of 23 June 1997, Seychelles has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter. May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 8** (*continued*)

**Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21**

**The President:** The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency The Honourable Imata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

*The Honourable Imata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted to the rostrum.*

97-85742 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

**President Kabua:** I wish to extend to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on the manner in which you have been conducting our meetings.

The full text of this statement will be distributed to delegations.

This is the first occasion on which I have addressed the General Assembly as President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I am greatly honoured to be here among the leaders of the nations of the world. Let me take this opportunity to thank the General Assembly for the respectful and gracious manner in which the Assembly honoured the memory of our late President, His Excellency Mr. Amata Kabua, upon hearing of his death.

On my way to New York, I reflected on the fact that our vision of the concept of world peace — a secure future, global stability, true prosperity, free trade and democracy — would have no meaning in an environment that had been rendered unsafe for the inhabitants of this planet. Five years ago my predecessor stood before the Rio Summit and described the dangers which our country and many of the low-lying island nations of the world face from rising sea levels and climate change. He described our fears and our acute sense of helplessness. He made a desperate plea. He asked the more developed nations of the world to take action and to address with all due speed and seriousness the problem of global warming.

We saw the Rio Summit as a great success and considered it a major step forward in the global effort to address the problems of the environment. Our Parliament ratified the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Relevant national legislation and regulations were designed to reflect the principles of Agenda 21. Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs was given the task of actively supporting international efforts aimed at promoting sustainable development. One such effort culminated in the Barbados Conference of 1994.

I am pleased to report that the Republic of the Marshall Islands is committed to playing its part in creating an environment that is safe for all future generations. Earlier this month we hosted a high-level regional consultative meeting on fisheries. Representatives of more than 20 different nations and territories participated. They explored effective ways and means for managing the region's marine resources. Our first concern has been to ensure that the tuna resources in our waters are managed and conserved in a sustainable manner. A lot of hard work and negotiation were needed, but we are now on the right track to establish a sound regulatory framework for the region. The political will has been firmly established. We will now work on the technical and management details at future meetings.

My Government is grateful to the Chairman of the Majuro conference, His Excellency Mr. Satya Nandan, whose efforts greatly assisted the outcome. We are also thankful to the countries that generously assisted at the meeting. The outcome of that meeting is being made available to the special session at the request of the participating countries.

A report from that meeting notes that very little progress has been made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is a disappointment to all of us in small island developing States. Many of us living in these extremely vulnerable areas have been active in negotiations on climate change. But no matter how determined we are, the sum total of our goodwill and support can produce only very little. We now know that this problem, like all other global environmental threats, can be addressed effectively only through the active and genuine cooperation of everyone, at all levels.

I believe that establishing common priorities at global, regional and bilateral levels is essential. In creating strong and meaningful partnerships between Governments, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, we give real meaning to the pursuit of sustainable development. We should be immersed fully in the task of translating these priorities into concrete, focused and result-driven actions.

The Leaders of the South Pacific Forum have made some modest progress in this respect. As we said at the Rio Summit, we are adopting an approach which recognizes the strengths of our cultural values and takes into account those outside elements which are essential for all aspects of modernization. The aim is to avoid inflicting any permanent harm on the land and marine resources which have allowed us to sustain our way of life for so many centuries.

We are cognizant of the inalienable rights of women to participate equally in the process of sustainable development. It is not acceptable for women to be restrained from unleashing their full potential. My Government finds this to be unacceptable at the national level, and we cannot accept such a state of affairs at the international level, either.

Another issue is the way in which scientific studies have been conducted in the name of the environment. I think that this has a direct relationship to the rights of people in a much deeper and broader sense. These studies tend to be driven by economic reasons alone. Hence, environmental problems under study are analysed in the context of their costs and benefits. Real social, cultural and legal issues, as well as basic human rights, are not always part of the research equation.

These are some of our modest accomplishments in the Marshall Islands and in the Pacific region since the Rio Summit. Our real fears, given our vulnerability, are based on environmental threats. A possible rise of a few feet in sea level becomes a question of life or death for our country. I must call upon those whose activities have direct and indirect impact on the environment to take note of the need to give serious attention to the practice of responsible and sustainable development. I can assure the Assembly of my country's commitment to a world that is safe for us now and for future generations.

I am concerned that for every minute spent on rhetoric, a thousand opportunities are lost for the environment. The old ways must now give way as quickly as possible to a new mindset and a new consciousness before it is too late.

Finally, I am convinced that a world that is incapable of taking care of its own environment also lacks respect for its inhabitants and is therefore incapable of giving us world peace. The Rio Conference showed us that it is possible for us to live up to our promises, that we can do better and that the world can be made safe for future generations. Let us take this opportunity to commit ourselves once more to the fine principles established in Rio. Let us make direct use of them for a better world.

**The President**: I thank the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands for his statement.

*The Honourable Imata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President**: I now give the floor to Mr. Rafael Martínez-Monro, Minister of the Environment of Venezuela.

*Mr. Rafael Martínez-Monro, Minister of the Environment of Venezuela, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Martínez-Monro** (Venezuela) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In the post-Stockholm world, Venezuela's regulation, conservation and management of natural resources for development was given form through the creation in 1976 of the Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources. The long-standing efforts within the context of the quest for a model of sustainable development, include the Treaty on Amazon Cooperation, and as early as 1978 one of its basic principles was sustainable development.

For the last 20 years the components of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental elements — have formed an organic whole in Venezuela, and this has been one of the central objectives of the various national development plans.

Five years have passed since the Earth Summit was held in Rio in June 1992. Twenty-five years have passed since the Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. We are meeting in this forum today to take stock of how much we have internalized, and therefore how much we have actually complied with, Agenda 21.

The balance sheet gives us much to think about. While it is true that we can speak of modest and timid advances, the majority of them have taken place in developing countries thanks to their own efforts and resources.

The figures have not taken a turn for the better: 25 per cent of humankind continues to consume 75 per cent of the planet's natural resources and to produce 90 per cent of the pollution that afflicts all of us. This attitude is reflected in the lack of implementation of the commitments undertaken at Rio. Official development assistance reflects a real lack of political will, as we note that the percentage of gross national product devoted to such assistance dropped from 0.34 per cent in 1992 to 0.27 per cent of 1995. These figures speak for themselves and point out the major difficulties involved in making the transition from environmental rhetoric to real execution of the Rio principles.

Given this background in which the desirable balance between development and environment is lacking in an increasingly globalizing world, Venezuela, together with other Member States of our hemisphere, has pledged and endeavoured to pursue a process of regionalizing Agenda 21. To this end, it has taken an active part in a number of regional meetings, the two most important of

which have been the Summit Conference of Heads of State of the Americas on sustainable development held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, and the first inter-American meeting for sustainable development, held in Washington, D.C., one of the activities in this area to which the Organization of American States is committed. Another part of these efforts is a proposal to execute Agenda 21 at the subregional level within the framework of the Treaty on Amazon Cooperation.

Our common problems are numerous, and we certainly believe that without an integral and overall approach to the issues of development and the environment the search to achieve the model of sustainable development will be difficult.

Of all these problems, undoubtedly none is more important than combating the poverty that our peoples suffer. This poverty represents the very denial of environmental management and sustainable development. The function of good government is to lead society to national well-being and good quality of life for its citizens.

It is not possible to combat poverty without ensuring that trade and environment are mutually supportive, without considering the link between sustainability and demographic patterns, without protecting and promoting better health indicators, without promoting sustainable human settlements and without changing the patterns of consumption and production of the developed countries.

In Venezuela and many other countries, this compels us to face the dual problem of urban and rural poverty. These have become one of the myths of the system of international cooperation, to the extent that all the programmes and systems that provide financial support are designed to combat rural poverty while ignoring demographic changes in the patterns of population concentration in most of the world.

Eighty per cent of the population of Venezuela lives in urban areas, and 60 per cent of that population exists at the threshold of poverty. This situation forces us to confront almost alone an essentially modern problem: the sustainable management of natural resources in the urban world. Our first challenge is therefore to supply the population with water, to ensure water quality and to treat sewage. It must be added that the inherent cost of such efforts is beyond the reach of most developing countries, most countries with economies in transition and even some developed countries.

In this context, any decision issuing from this special session of the General Assembly should take into account that in order to speak about management of national resources for development one must at the same time consider carefully the necessary means of implementation. These include financial mechanisms and resources, transfers of environmentally sound technologies, reciprocal support and relationships between trade and the environment, scientific exchanges, education for development and human progress, access to information in all its forms, participation in civil society and the strengthening of institutions.

However, the adoption of a broad-ranging and ambitious plan of action would not suffice in the absence of real and sincere cooperation and international support that will honour the concept that inspired the Rio outcome: a new global partnership association for sustainable development.

Agenda 21 will never be a global reality until there are processes of cooperation at the international level on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, which take shape primarily in the implementation and development of environmental conventions and the activities of intergovernmental agencies and the various regional and international financial agencies.

Venezuela, embracing the Orinoco, the Caribbean, the Amazon and the Andes, a country blessed with vast biodiversity and renewable and non-renewable natural resources, is aware that without solidarity there can be no sustainable development and that the human being continues to be the focal point of that development. For this reason, as a generous country with a young population, it is unswervingly committed to our environment. A young man of the Renaissance, Pico de la Mirandola, once reminded us, in his magnificent work about the dignity of humankind, that we shape what we are, and thus are co-creators of our world.

**The President:** I thank the Minister of the Environment of Venezuela for his statement.

*Mr. Rafael Martínez-Monro, Minister of the Environment of Venezuela, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Herizo Razafimahaleo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar.

*Mr. Herizo Razafimahaleo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Razafimahaleo** (Madagascar): On behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, I would like to express to you, Mr. President, my sincere appreciation for the quality of your chairmanship of our meeting, and I wish you continuing success in conducting this highly important session.

(*spoke in French*)

When it came to deciding whether to take part in this special session of the General Assembly, I must confess that I felt a certain scepticism tinged with a vague glimmer of hope. The scepticism arose when I thought about the Rio + 5 meeting held at the beginning of the year in Brazil, in which the level of participation contrasted sharply with that of 1992, when a host of Heads of State or Government graced the first Earth Summit with their presence. The scepticism was also based on the disillusioned and alarmist reports from the various meetings that have been held since then. These include the pan-African conference on implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the follow-up in Africa to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the ad hoc meeting of the group of experts on implementation of special measures contained in Agenda 21 for the least developed countries, the fifth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and others.

The Assembly will agree with me that the atmosphere that prevails today, five years after Rio de Janeiro, is no longer that of the heady and exhilarating euphoria of 1992. The unpleasant feeling of apprehension that grips us is wholly understandable. On the one hand, despite declarations of good intentions and even commitments entered into publicly and emphatically in Rio, very few significant measures and even fewer specific or momentous results have been noted, particularly in the area of finance and technology transfer.

Moreover, the environmental situation of our planet continues to deteriorate. As previous speakers have emphasized, emissions of pollutants have increased, renewable resources, including fresh water, forests and arable land, are diminishing and the endemic poverty of certain countries is accelerating the degradation of natural resources and the phenomenon of desertification. Lastly, the provoked deterioration of the natural habitat and fragile ecosystems has led to a dangerous impoverishment of biodiversity. Globalization of the economy has, of course, given us grounds to hope that poverty may be mitigated in certain countries. The internalization of trade has already undoubtedly helped improve the well-being of some. But we have to recognize that this has also led to the deterioration of socio-economic conditions for others. In short, the rich are destroying the environment because they are getting richer and the poor are destroying the environment because they are getting poorer.

The negative impression given by the sombre picture I have painted is fortunately softened by a vague glimmer of hope — hope born of the renewed awareness we are seeing and the globalization of efforts to meet the challenges facing us at the turn of the century, the greatest of which is the environmental devastation, bedeviling our planet. For evidence of this hope, I need look no further than the concerted efforts of Governments and international development-finance organizations that are getting down to the task of integrating the environmental dimension into the economic decision-making process, the proliferation of partnerships between major social groups and the catalytic role the United Nations system is striving to play in the implementation of Agenda 21.

This is the umpteenth time consciousness has been raised. Let us hope that this time it will be for real.

With respect to Madagascar's commitment, my country has backed its words with actions. The impetus of Rio has been sustained by various specific measures initiated as of 1991 on the basis of the establishment of a Malagasy Environmental Plan of Action whose main thrust coincides with that of Agenda 21.

Our Environmental Plan of Action set clear objectives spread over three five-year phases, which began in 1991. The specific achievements of phase I include integrated programmes of action to combat poverty; an integrated approach to land planning and management; action to combat deforestation by strengthening the protection and sustainable use of endangered forests; the preservation of biodiversity through the establishment of protected areas and national parks; the protection of marine and coastal areas; and local responsibility for small-scale conservation and development projects.

Aside from the objectives set out for phase I, efforts have also been aimed at certain intersectoral issues, such as health, population and sustainable human settlements.

On the basis of our own experience in sustainable development, we should like a number of recommendations to be taken into account in the formulation of urgent measures for the next five years.

First, we recognize that Agenda 21 is still the basic reference instrument for the conception of any strategy or the execution of any rapid and concrete actions for sustainable development. We also reaffirm our total adherence to the principles of mutual interest and to the common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries set out in the Rio Declaration and our support for its full implementation.

We confirm that official development assistance remains a crucial source of development financing, particularly for the least-developed countries. In that context, we urge the developed countries to honour the commitments they undertook in Rio to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to development assistance. The developing countries, for their part, will of course have to exercise greater discipline in the management of this assistance, especially through the increased and more enthusiastic involvement of the private sector. We urge that the Global Environment Facility be restructured and adequately replenished in order to facilitate access to these resources.

We encourage the greater involvement of the important groups of society — particularly civil society — of women, children and grass roots organizations in the decision-making process, taking into account the values and know-how particular to each country.

The United Nations was established in its time in order to prevent humanity from damaging and annihilating itself through warfare, human rights violations and anti-democratic tendencies. Later, supranational organizations with economic missions, such as the World Trade Organization, were created by the international community to meet the challenge of economic well-being, with the idea of penalizing or even sanctioning countries that reject the healthy opening-up of international trade.

We ardently hope that concepts that have been aired in recent years concerning the "democracy dividend" and the "economic adjustment and reform dividend" can also be extended to the environmental field. The policy of safeguarding the environment and biodiversity contributes to the survival of the entire planet, not only that of the countries considered. An "environment dividend" should be advocated for the least-developed countries that have made a firm commitment but whose insufficient means have not allowed them to step up the fight to eradicate poverty, the main cause and consequence of environmental degradation.

The question is therefore whether the powers to impose sanctions or grant rewards can fall to such programmes as the United Nations Environment Programme in its present form, or whether it is necessary to contemplate either strengthening its mandate or setting up a new structure from the symbiosis of those already in place. Proposals along these lines have already been advanced by a number of speakers at this rostrum and I would urge the Assembly not to reject them out of hand.

For its part, and to conclude, Madagascar, recognized throughout the world as a shrine and showcase of nature since time immemorial — and in that context possessing treasures and specific characteristics that are rare, if not unique in the world — is proud to abide by the measures advocated in Agenda 21. My country endorses the oft-cited idea that the Earth, the planet on which and thanks to which we live today, this space that we have inherited from our predecessors, is on loan to us from our descendants, who also have the right to enjoy its blessings. The stakes are clear and so is our responsibility.

**The President:** I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar for his statement.

*Mr. Herizo Razafimahaleo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mamane Brah, Minister of Water Resources and the Environment of Niger.

*Mr. Mamane Brah, Minister of Water Resources and the Environment of Niger, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Brah** (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset to say how pleased my delegation and I are at seeing you, Sir, preside over the work of this nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. Your

great experience in international affairs and outstanding contribution to the triumph of the ideals of our Organization are unanimously recognized.

To the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, I reaffirm the full support and sincere encouragement of His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Mainassara Bare, President of the Republic of Niger, and his Government for the commendable efforts he has tirelessly exerted to preserve the peace, stability and progress of our world.

To the French delegation, we extend our heartfelt condolences upon the death of Jacques Cousteau, who worked outstandingly throughout his life to protect the environment.

Niger, a member of the Commission on Sustainable Development, hails the convening of this special session of the General Assembly, an occasion for the international community to come together and pool its efforts to implement Agenda 21, which was designed to bring solutions to the problems associated with development and the environment. Agenda 21 remains fully relevant in view of the ongoing degradation of the environment, the depletion of natural resources and, above all, the tenacity of poverty. Thus, only a reinvigorated political resolve, translated into specific action, can allow us to reverse this trend, which is particularly disquieting and intolerable for the future of humanity.

As a Sahelian country suffering from the severe degradation of what remains of its meagre natural resources, and in the throes of significant population growth alongside feeble economic growth — a situation that is aggravating the poverty that already afflicts a large part of its population — Niger, my country, is and will remain firmly committed to Agenda 21, born at the Earth Summit, as the ideal platform for the promotion of sustainable development.

It is that commitment, moreover, that prompted Niger to ratify all the Rio and post-Rio conventions and agreements, including the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In order to pursue the objectives of Agenda 21, my country's Government has created a coordinating body known as the National Council on the Environment for Sustainable Development. The Council is entrusted with coordinating the drafting, implementation and follow-up evaluation of the National Environment Plan for Sustainable Development, of which the National Programme of Action to Combat Desertification and Manage Natural Resources is a key component. We are also undertaking a diagnosis and stocktaking of the environmental situation in Niger and are considering the establishment of a national environment fund.

I also wish to point out that, since the Rio Summit, Niger, in addition to its specific action in the field, has committed itself to significant political and strategic reform with a view to achieving sustainable development. Indeed, we in Niger are convinced that the key to solving problems of the environment and development lies, generally speaking, in relevant innovative efforts built on firm and sustained national choices.

However, it must be acknowledged that for many of the countries present here today — the developing ones in particular — the internal efforts currently under way will not alone be sufficient to permit the implementation of environmental and social policies that will lead to sustainable development.

This special session, in our view, should therefore impel our international community to make real headway in establishing a new world alliance to safeguard the environment and reduce social inequities, an alliance that was advocated at the Rio Summit.

Realizing this worldwide ideal will involve stepped-up cooperation among our States on issues relating to the environment and will also require the granting of additional resources to the developing countries, and in particular the least developed ones — resources that will supplement national efforts at financial mobilization. These resources should be allocated, *inter alia*, to the Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which is the only post-Rio Convention that does not have its own funds for implementation.

I take this opportunity to appeal to the international community, and to the developed countries in particular, to make the global mechanism an instrument that will mobilize the financial resources necessary to implement that Convention, which is of crucial importance for the developing countries, particularly those of Africa.

Only in this way will we effectively tackle the major social issues addressed in Agenda 21: poverty, population, health and human settlements. For those issues are closely interrelated and have an economic and ecological impact on the management of natural resources, the most important facet of Agenda 21.

Likewise, questions such as the debt of the developing countries, the transfer of technology, the use of energy and fresh water, industrial pollution and the links between desertification and poverty — issues that are indissolubly linked with the problems of the environment and development — must be taken into account in order to identify clear priorities.

This means for my country that the spirit of Rio must be revived if Agenda 21 is to be implemented and finally to become a social reality.

For its part, the Government of my country wishes to reaffirm its readiness to involve itself in any initiatives designed to tackle the major problems of the environment and to build sustainable development.

In conclusion, I should like to stress that my country fully subscribes to the position adopted by the Group of 77 and China and to the resolutions adopted at Ouagadougou by the Pan-African Conference on the Convention to Combat Desertification and Agenda 21.

On behalf of my Government, I wish also to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the bilateral and multilateral partners that are endeavouring in our country to safeguard and improve the environment for sustainable development.

**The President:** I thank the Minister of Water Resources and the Environment of Niger.

*Mr. Mamane Brah, Minister of Water Resources and the Environment of Niger, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

*Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Velayati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) *(spoke in Persian; English text furnished by the delegation)*: When the bipolar system collapsed and was replaced by a less rigid transitional order, endeavours to set standards of behaviour for the emerging world order based on the rule of law and the common but differentiated responsibility of global actors began moving with unprecedented speed and enthusiasm. High-level conferences to address a wide range of pressing issues were convened with unparalleled frequency in order to take advantage of the new post-cold-war optimism.

Considering that the constituent elements of the environment — water, air, soil and living species — are the common heritage of mankind whose degradation would pose a threat to humanity at large, it was indeed appropriate that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development be one of the very first such major international conferences to take place since the advent of the new world situation.

The rapid industrialization of the developed countries, coupled with their unsustainable patterns of consumption, have had an irreversible and destructive impact on the environment. Regrettably, unbridled consumption, unsustainable patterns of production and disposal, and the movement of toxic and hazardous waste — including nuclear waste resulting from the nuclear-weapon programmes of certain developed countries, particularly the United States — are but a few examples of the historical and contemporary practices of the industrialized countries that have directly contributed to environmental degradation.

Yet the very same countries are trying to impose, at a rapidly growing pace, new obligations on the developing world in an attempt to divert public attention from, and thus evade, their own historical responsibilities. Thus the establishment of a conceptual and balanced relationship between environment and development, coupled with the forging of a new global partnership to achieve sustainable development through international cooperation, must be considered a milestone and the most pivotal achievement of Rio.

However, five years later, a realistic and comprehensive appraisal indicates a mixed result. The fact that some progress has been made in the implementation of Agenda 21 is undeniable. Yet it is as true — and hardly a cause for elation, much less complacency — that lack of progress in the fulfilment of international commitments undertaken at Rio is most glaring. Worse still, the global environment continues to suffer further, possibly facing irreversible degradation and deterioration.

I deem it necessary to underscore the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, which constitutes an underlying concept in the Rio Declaration. While we have a collective responsibility for the preservation of the environment, the nature and scope of this responsibility varies for different members of the international community. Given their role in environmental degradation over the past two centuries and their current access to environmentally sound technologies and financial resources, developed countries in particular bear a special legal and moral responsibility. Therefore, instead of imposing new constraints and commitments on the developing countries, they should start living up to their own undertakings. It is totally unjustifiable for the developing world to be asked to pay the price of environmental degradation, which historically has been perpetrated by the industrialized nations, which continue to bear the largest responsibility for polluting our environment, notwithstanding their propaganda on environmental preservation.

While the world faces a rather gloomy picture when it comes to overall development and environment, the international community's resolve to face the challenge head on, so vividly demonstrated at this important universal gathering at the highest political level, is a cause for hope as well as a strong motive for renewed enthusiasm and vigour. What we need to achieve here, more than a reaffirmation of our previous commitments and undertakings, is to strive to arrive at ways and means of a better, more faithful and accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 in its totality, as an integrated whole and not arbitrarily dissected or mutilated.

Let us be frank. Faithfulness to the Rio outcomes and Agenda 21 cannot and should not find practical reflection only in the elaboration of an ever-increasing body of international legal instruments, whose implementation and compliance serves to preserve the existing high level of living standards in a limited number of countries while at the same time, much to the chagrin of the South, encroaching upon the sovereign right of States to exploit their natural resources and impeding and obliterating the development process in the name of protecting and preserving the environment.

The evident zeal of the developed segment of the international community to set new benchmarks and targets and create a long catalogue of dos and don'ts does indeed need to be complemented with commensurate concern and a commitment in practice to providing the necessary financial resources and environmentally sound technologies and know-how.

Having reiterated the importance of dedication to and compliance with the outcome of Rio, I must also reaffirm the continued commitment of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the principles and objectives of the Rio Conference, Agenda 21 in particular. Ever since the Rio Summit, our National Committee on Sustainable Development and our High Council on Environment, under the aegis of the President, have consistently endeavoured to integrate sustainable development objectives in our national development plans.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that if the current trend continues, the next generations will face ecological disaster. We should therefore do away with the shackles of egocentric short-term interest-seeking mindsets. What is required is courage, political will and commitment to opt for bold action. We should be prepared to act more responsibly. Understandably, however, there are and will be some resistance to change. Trade and labour unions need to be persuaded through education campaigns that environmental protection is a must.

In an era of globalization, no single country or group of countries can overcome problems of a global nature. Today, the opportunity for international cooperation is greater than it was 25 years ago. Let us seize this opportunity, for the price of inaction would be insupportable by future generations.

**The President:** I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement.

*Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Martin Bartenstein, Federal Minister of the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs of Austria.

*Mr. Martin Bartenstein, Federal Minister of the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs of Austria, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Bartenstein** (Austria): At the outset, I would like to associate myself with the views expressed by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Wim Kok, on behalf of the European Union. I would like also to express my pleasure at seeing you, Ambassador Razali, presiding over this solemn session of the General Assembly.

The year 1997 is of special importance for the global environment. This special session affords us the opportunity to reaffirm the commitment we undertook as an international community five years ago: the commitment to set our world on a sustainable course. This is more urgent today than it was at Rio, since the turnaround point has today moved even farther away than it was in 1992. We must not waste this opportunity here in New York. But neither must we waste the opportunity at the Kyoto Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December this year to agree on significant reduction targets for greenhouse gases for the years 2005 and 2010.

The European Union took the lead as early as March of this year by deciding on a reduction target of 15 per cent for 2010. Within the European Union, Austria, together with Germany, Denmark and now, we hope, also the United Kingdom, is the most advanced country, committed to a 25 per cent reduction within the system of internal burden-sharing. However, while the European Union has taken the lead, we are still waiting for others to follow. Let me appeal especially to the world's biggest user of energy and therefore the top emitter of greenhouse gases to accept the responsibility by joining the European Union on our way to Kyoto to save our climate. Leadership in today's world means not only leadership in technology, economic matters or military strength but also, and perhaps above all, leading the world to sustainable development.

Austria attaches particularly great importance to a strong recommendation by the special session on sustainable energy. We repeat our proposal to launch a decade for sustainable energy starting in the year 2001. We also urge a clear decision on the start of the preparatory process for the 2001 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development dedicated to energy. In our view, the organizational meeting of the intersessional working group on energy and environment must take place in conjunction with the Commission on Sustainable Development's 1998 session so that substantive work can start in 1999.

Austria thus stands ready to further advance international cooperation on sustainable energy by hosting an international conference of experts and policy makers on renewable energy. I am very pleased to say that there is increasing interest both at the national level and at the level of the European Commission in supporting intergovernmental work on sustainable energy with concrete development cooperation efforts.

The Commission on Sustainable Development has repeatedly underlined the crucial role that forests play for the protection of the environment and in particular for the global climate. Austria actively supports all efforts to achieve the sustainable management of forests. Agreeing at this session to set in motion a negotiating process for a global convention on forests would, in our view, greatly contribute to this goal.

This special session of the General Assembly comes, in my view, at a very crucial moment for the international community. In the countries of the North, we have achieved important goals in terms of environmental protection in the narrow sense of the word. In Austria we have achieved the turnaround: in my country the air is clean, and the waters of most of our rivers and all of our lakes are of drinking-water quality. And we have made good progress in increasing our share of renewable energies to 27 per cent and in avoiding and recycling waste. Now we have to navigate the transition towards integrating the principles of sustainability into our economy at large.

In this context I commend the effort of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization to focus its activities in the reform process on cleaner and sustainable industrial development.

The all too modest progress since Rio is not only based on our inability to make our citizens understand the necessity of sustainable development. It is also connected with the fact that we have not been able since Rio to involve either our Heads of State or our fellow ministers in this process. One of the lessons out of Rio + 5 should therefore be to have issues of sustainable development continuously on the agenda of our Heads of State and to maintain the momentum until Rio + 10.

In order to monitor our transition towards sustainability it will be very important to establish clear benchmarks, to set definite targets, which may be different for different groups of countries, and to advance the work under way on indicators for sustainable development.

Developing adequate ways and means of managing scarce resources at the global level will make it necessary to develop new international mechanisms that allow for fair sharing of the short-term burden that the transition towards sustainability will impose on us all. We should start to look actively for ways and means by which just compensation can be given to groups of countries or

groups within a given country for disproportionate burdens they might have to bear in the transition towards sustainability. One such measure which I favour strongly would be to increase taxation of resource use and to decrease taxation of labour. Austria is very active within the European Union in promoting a common approach to ecological tax reform.

Five years from now we should be able to note that progress has been made in eradicating poverty. Austria is wholeheartedly committed to the target set by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development of reducing extreme poverty by half by the year 2015. Poverty eradication and changing patterns of consumption need to be the leitmotif which will guide all our efforts in the years to come. Since it is a change in value systems that we need if our individual citizens are to adopt ever more sustainable consumption patterns, we should also work together to promote a new ethics of sustainability.

Austria will also strive to intensify cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A major area of cooperation will be transport. Transport, as we know, is a sector where developments are currently going from bad to worse in the European region, but also in other regions.

Today, five years after Rio, we cannot say that we are headed towards sustainable development. This special session of the General Assembly should find us determined to learn the lessons of the last five years so that five years from now, at Rio + 10, we can declare to our peoples, "Yes, we are on course towards sustainability".

**The President:** I thank the Federal Minister of the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs of Austria for his statement.

*Mr. Martin Bartenstein, Federal Minister of the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs of Austria, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sarwono Kusumaatmadja, Minister of State for the Environment of Indonesia.

*Mr. Sarwono Kusumaatmadja, Minister of State for the Environment of Indonesia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kusumaatmadja** (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing the Indonesian delegation's great pleasure in seeing you, Sir, presiding over this crucial special session of the General Assembly devoted to imparting a renewed thrust and vitality to the implementation of Agenda 21. We are fully confident that, given your consummate leadership and diplomatic skills, you will guide this special session to a successful conclusion.

Five years ago in Rio de Janeiro, President Soeharto stated that, in an era of pervasive change and profound transformation, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) stood out as a major milestone for mankind, and that no one could deny that the world was facing increased danger of environmental catastrophe, diminishing quality of life and a grave threat to the long-term survival of the global ecosystem. Now, regrettably, five years later and 25 years after Stockholm, evidence abounds of the growing threats to sustainable development and the fact that these are being further compounded by new and emerging trends. The euphoria and optimism that characterized Rio in 1992 have long since given way to disappointment and uncertainty. The expected implementation of Agenda 21 and the other substantive outcomes of the Conference are still far from being realized.

Notwithstanding such disappointments, we fully recognize the continued validity and efficacy of these outcomes. Consequently, we see no alternative to the global partnership that was forged in Rio for effectively promoting sustainable development. We are therefore firm in our conviction that no attempts should be made to reopen Agenda 21 or any of the other substantive outcomes of UNCED during this special session. To us, the basic challenge is clear. We must first and foremost analyze what in fact went wrong with the implementation of the Rio outcomes and, secondly, what can now be done to correct it. This meeting is therefore of crucial importance for measuring the level of our commitment and resolve to reverse the downward spiral into developmental stagnation and environmental degradation.

As was repeatedly emphasized at UNCED in 1992, the predominant sources of environmental degradation on our planet result both from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, mainly in the developed countries, and from pervasive poverty and underdevelopment, which is still rampant in the developing countries. Thus, as far as the developing countries are concerned, environmental sustainability can be effectively achieved only by strenuously combating poverty and underdevelopment. But to do this successfully would require the mobilization of new and additional

financial resources, technological capabilities and enhanced human capacities over and above those already committed to development. This would obviously constitute a formidable task for most developing countries. It was in Rio that a significant breakthrough was made in this regard. UNCED successfully forged a global partnership which heralded a new era of international cooperation ensuring the inseparable linkage between the environment and development.

However, the realization of the Rio commitment on substantial new and additional financial resources has fallen far short of expectations. While accelerated liberalization has presented us with new opportunities for increasing foreign direct investment, albeit unequally distributed, the weakening global partnership has manifested itself in dwindling official development assistance resources. It is therefore important that the commitments made in Rio with regard to financial resources and the funding mechanism should be fully adhered to and seriously implemented. Likewise, the Rio promise on the transfer of environmentally sound technologies has remained largely unfulfilled. Hence, there is a continuing need for international cooperation as stipulated in Agenda 21 to build the economic, technical and managerial capabilities of the developing countries, which requires a long-term joint effort by enterprises and Governments.

*Mr. Baumanis (Latvia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

At the very core of the development process today is the compelling need to eradicate poverty from the face of the earth. The achievement of environmental goals greatly depends upon success in this process. We therefore fully agree with the report on the need for time-bound targets for the eradication of poverty. Indeed, in Indonesia, where we have been implementing such targets, the results have proved to be promising. In this context, we have continued to incorporate poverty eradication programmes into our current, and sixth, Five-Year Development Plan. These include programmes for the most backward villages, family welfare savings and business credit for poor families. We believe that these programmes will help to eradicate absolute poverty within our targeted time frame. In fact, we have incorporated many of these experiences into our South-South cooperation programme as priority projects.

Indeed, in Indonesia we have translated many of our commitments and pledges made in Rio into concrete actions. As agreed at the Conference, we established a post-UNCED Planning and Capacity-Building Project as a follow-up mechanism, which was invested with the responsibility, among other things, for developing a comprehensive national strategy for sustainable development. The process of formulating this strategy has involved over a thousand participants nationwide, has taken two years to complete and has focused on integrating economic, social and environmental development into a single policy package to ensure that sustainable development will become a reality in Indonesia. The launching of this strategy, which is called the Indonesian Agenda 21, marks the end of an extensive period of consultation and analysis charting Indonesia's path to sustainable development.

Before concluding, let me briefly refer to what we consider to be an environmental issue of great importance: that of forests. As major multi-functional resources, forests are significant assets for achieving sustainable development, and their roles include being vast reservoirs of biodiversity, carbon sinks and renewable sources of commercial timber and energy. The challenge of promoting the sustainable development and management of forests is a formidable task, and yet it is also a critical one. My delegation thus sees merit in the early elaboration of a legally binding instrument on the sustainable management of forests. The elaboration of such an instrument should be carried out through consensus so as to reflect our firm compliance with the existing conventions, including, in particular, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification. We firmly believe that only through such a legally binding instrument can we ensure sound and sustainable forest management that is predictable, non-discriminatory, rule-based and transparent.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister of State for the Environment of Indonesia for his statement.

*Mr. Sarwono Kusumaatmadja, Minister of State for the Environment of Indonesia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Lesotho.

*Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Lesotho, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Mosisili** (Lesotho): I should like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly for bringing the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly on an Agenda for Development to a successful conclusion. This success demonstrates the resolve of the global community to place the United Nations at the centre of the international development effort and to forge, through the intergovernmental process, a partnership that is indispensable for sustainable development. It is our hope that this historic landmark will positively inspire other intergovernmental negotiations and further invigorate the spirit of partnership in sustainable development.

Lesotho aligns itself with the statement made by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The convening of this special session of the General Assembly demonstrates our continuing commitment to the global partnership that was forged five years ago to save our planet from environmental degradation and to enhance sustainable economic and social development for humanity. As we look back on the road that we have traversed since Rio, we must do so ready to share the burden of our collective failures. We must also share the credit for the modest successes that we have made towards achieving the targets that we set for ourselves in Agenda 21.

Among these successes we mention the negotiation and conclusion of a number of important international instruments for the management and protection of the environment. Various institutional mechanisms have also been put in place to protect the environment and to accelerate sustainable development.

For the developing countries, poverty and the lack of financial resources and access to appropriate technology have remained major constraints to the implementation of the commitments of the Earth Summit. High expectations for the increase of overseas development assistance were raised in Rio. Regrettably, these have translated into a substantial reduction in the overall flow of resources from the developed to the developing countries during the period under review. This has compromised the capacity of the developing countries to implement the Rio agreements. It is nevertheless encouraging to hear the renewed commitments made at this special session by many of our development partners, particularly by the member states of the European Union, to stop the present downward trend in official development assistance in order to reach the 0.7 per cent official development assistance target agreed in 1992.

Multilateralism remains the main vehicle through which global environmental protection and development can be sustained. But at the national level sustainable development must be supported by political stability and sound economic policies that are founded on democratic governance, the protection of human rights, gender equality and full commitment to the eradication of poverty.

According to recent World Bank reports Lesotho attained an unprecedented economic growth rate of above 10 per cent of gross domestic product in the last two to three years. However, poverty still pervades the fabric of our society. Unemployment stands at over 30 per cent, and 40 per cent of the population are still classified as poor. Poverty is closely associated with environmental degradation. A pathway out of poverty must be made.

Lesotho participated actively in the process leading to the Earth Summit in 1992. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) we have made some progress towards living up to the commitments that we made. To enhance our capacity to meet our commitments within the framework of the obligations we undertook in Rio, we have set up a new institution within the Prime Minister's office for the coordination, regulation and monitoring of all the national environmental activities. We have also adopted our own national action plan to implement Agenda 21.

A central element of this action plan is a programme that seeks to address problems of poverty and unemployment on the one hand, and environmental degradation on the other. For example, an environmental youth programme has been established whose objective is to give employment to the youth throughout the country. It is geared towards combating land degradation, conserving water and undertaking various waste management activities.

At 2.6 per cent, our national population growth rate is a matter of serious concern because of the pressure it exerts on the country's few resources. A national population policy has been adopted since Rio, and programmes are being implemented.

The majority of our population that resides in the rural areas depend on the use of biomass for their energy sources. This makes up 85 per cent of the total energy consumption. Afforestation programmes have fallen short of the demand and the Government is finalizing a new national forestry action plan to circumvent a possible

environmental disaster if targets are not met. The promotion of appropriate technology is geared towards the use of renewable sources of energy. Public awareness on domestic energy conservation measures has mounted and will have to be enhanced. Commercial and industrial energy conservation programmes will be included under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional energy management project.

Lesotho is a mountainous country with fragile ecosystems. These mountains are an important source of fresh water, not only for Lesotho but for much of southern Africa. The scarcity of fresh water will, in the near future, loom as a critical problem of global proportions. Lesotho is therefore acutely aware of its responsibility to preserve and manage the existing water resources for the benefit of the region. It is in this context that the provision of financial resources and appropriate technology to the country assumes great significance.

The goal of achieving sustainable development of human settlements to protect the natural resources and environment is in danger of not being achieved unless the requisite resources are in place.

At UNCED most countries reaffirmed their commitment to the United Nations target of committing 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance. Some countries have achieved this target, and we urge those that have not done so to endeavour to do so in the spirit of promoting partnership in sustainable development.

We have come here to rekindle the spirit of the 1992 Earth Summit. We must recommit ourselves to the Rio agreements so that the next few years into the twenty-first century can realize increased impetus of our development programmes.

**The Acting President**: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Lesotho for his statement.

*Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Lesotho, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable George W. Vella, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Environment of Malta.

*Mr. George W. Vella, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Environment of Malta, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Vella** (Malta): The Maltese delegation wishes to join the other delegations in pledging its continued support and collaboration in ensuring that this special session achieves its primary objective of reaffirming the letter and the spirit of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The improvement in the quality of life of our citizens cannot be isolated from the challenges we face to safeguard and enhance our natural environment, or from the consequences which this same development brings along with it.

Five years ago in Rio, there was elation on the adoption of an agenda for the new millennium. Agenda 21 was seen as a breakthrough in international environmental cooperation. For many, it was a blueprint for global action within the newly laid parameters of sustainability. Indeed, Agenda 21 was perceived as a comprehensive blueprint for sustainable development, the sustainable use of resources and the creation of the fiscal, technical and administrative frameworks necessary for economic and social development.

While not detracting from the importance of achievements since Rio, we must admit that much more needs to be done to reassert the principles and implement the commitments so delicately moulded and expressed in Agenda 21.

Malta joins the international community in today's evaluation exercise of the successes and failures in the implementation of Agenda 21. The Rio principles and objectives set in 1992 are still valid and, if appropriately followed, will lead us to a brighter twenty-first century.

In the forefront of our analysis should be the revitalization of the concept of sustainable development, the identification of innovative approaches for cooperation, the definition of priorities and the raising of the profile of issues that have not been sufficiently addressed, such as changing consumption patterns, energy production and utilization, transport, urban issues and the availability of fresh water among others.

At the same time, additional efforts will have to be made to address the problems linked to economic growth, the expansion of trade and the eradication of poverty —

issues that have a direct impact and at the same time depend heavily on the sustainable management of natural and human resources.

It is ironic that in this day and age, when everyone speaks of the world having become a "global village", we still use the words "north" and "south" not only to convey geographical concepts but also to denote the lingering painful existence of the sharp divide between developed and developing countries. The much-desired "North-South" dialogue and all ensuing attempts at bridging the gap between the "rich North" and the "poor South" have not been achieved.

Many of the developing countries are living in the midst of vast natural resources that go untapped by the local population for lack of the necessary education, expertise, technology or financial resources. In most instances, these are exploited by those who have the means, thereby accentuating the ever-widening gap of inequality and providing fertile ground for more social tension and threats to global security and stability. This is definitely not what was envisaged in Rio.

Our concern with the environment and sustainability is for the preservation of whatever exists to be at the service of humanity. If a large percentage of humanity is deprived of opportunities to enjoy the benefits of the world's resources, what would be the use of this large-scale exercise? The sovereign rights of developing countries fully to benefit from the proper utilization of their resources should be fully respected and not hindered or denied because of so-called environmental considerations.

Humanity still faces the painful realities of poverty and destitution around the globe, phenomena which result from uneven development and an unjust distribution of the world's wealth and resources, which lead, in turn, to a lowering of health standards, ethnic strife, economic refugees, extremism and fundamentalism, problems which are all interrelated and which must be tackled in a holistic manner.

On the eve of the new millennium, we have to adopt a prudent yet effective course of action to create the right balance between an open world economic environment and steady and socially just development. In pursuing sustainable development for the twenty-first century, we have to concentrate and support efforts that will have as their mainstay the fight against poverty, the protection of the environment, the sustainable use of natural resources, a more equitable distribution of wealth and an international trade regime that is less encumbered by restrictive or discriminatory practices.

As a European country situated in the centre of the Mediterranean, in the stage of transition from a developing to a developed State, Malta has always worked assiduously through this world body and other international forums to promote partnership and cooperation in our region and beyond. Suffice it to mention Malta's initiative in giving the Law of the Sea to the world.

As a small island State, conscious of our vulnerability and believing that threats to our security are mostly environmental, economic and social in nature, we have over the last 20 years, and even more so since Rio, undertaken various initiatives to protect and safeguard our environment. Malta calls for the implementation of the commitments of the Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and looks forward to a comprehensive and effective review by the General Assembly in 1999.

Malta is conscious of the fact that our need for development, our expansion in economic activity, our raised standards of living, our high population density and our heavy dependence on tourism will all have to be taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of our economic and environmental policies.

Malta is contributing to sustainable development at the regional and global level and hosts the International Ocean Institute and the International Maritime Organization's International Maritime Law Institute, both of which organize courses in ocean management for students from overseas, especially from developing countries. Malta is also proud to host the regional marine pollution control centre which functions as part of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

The Government of Malta rightly believes that our country's interests cannot be segregated from the concerns of the Mediterranean region and has been at the forefront in setting up the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development within the framework of the Barcelona convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan. This Commission is an expression of active cooperation amongst Mediterranean States, which have acknowledged that an appropriate strategy for the conservation of the Mediterranean cannot be restricted by national boundaries but should have as its objective the common good of all

the peoples of the Mediterranean, who in spite of their diversity share a common concern, namely, the protection of the Mediterranean region from environmental degradation. Malta intends to follow these initiatives also through the paths opened up to us by the Euro-Mediterranean process and its programme of action.

While expressing satisfaction at what has already been achieved during the last five years since Rio, Malta believes that it is our duty to our future generations to accelerate the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21 in a concerted effort to protect the global environment and to promote real, human-centred sustainable development.

**The Acting President**: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Environment of Malta for his statement.

*The Honourable George W. Vella, MD, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Environment of Malta, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Frank H. Watson, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security of the Bahamas.

*The Honourable Frank H. Watson, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security of the Bahamas, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Watson** (Bahamas): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or the Rio Conference, held in 1992 has caused significant, positive changes in attitudes towards the protection of the environment.

In five years, we have moved from a mind-set which assumed that the natural world was self-renewing and self-sustaining to an awareness of the need for environmental responsibility to protect a fragile planet. It is no longer acceptable for industry to pollute rivers and streams or to poison the air we breathe. We have recoiled from the positions which accepted acid rain as the downside of progress and we have raised the alarm against polluters of the oceans.

Indeed, five years after Rio we appear, in growing numbers, to have found the will and the determination to begin to heal and restore the damage wreaked upon nature in less environmentally conscious times.

Globally, we are seeking ways and the means to achieve sustainable development. And, we are making giant steps forward in this regard.

The Government of the Bahamas has, since 1992, incorporated the principles of sustainable development into its national development policies as regards environmental protection of marine and terrestrial resources, enhanced land-use planning and more careful regulation of the development process. The creation of a coordinating commission for environment, science and technology in 1993 brought focus to Government's environmental agenda. Environmental impact assessments have been incorporated into the requirements for all major development projects in the Bahamas. The results of a national land-use study will facilitate Government's efforts to ensure that future land-use conforms to national objectives.

The Bahamas is proud of the progress we have made on the environmental front and appreciates that much of our progress has been facilitated by the process coming out of both the Rio Conference and the 1994 United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States which met in Bridgetown, Barbados.

However, we are also aware that the progress made is not nearly enough. In Barbados, it was recognized that island States are particularly vulnerable to natural and environmental disasters alike and, moreover, that these islands generally have limited capacity to respond to and recover from such disasters. Small island developing States face the same challenges as do the largest countries of the world, but we have restricted space and resources with which to address our problems. Small island developing States have delicate economies and an overwhelming dependence upon a narrow resource base and international trade. Our economies are open and we have virtually no means of seriously influencing the terms of trade to our benefit.

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in our region. It provides jobs for many of our people and contributes substantially to our economic development. In the Bahamas, it is the lifeblood of our economy.

But its impact on our islands can be staggering if not carefully managed. Along with its many benefits, tourism imposes severe pressures on our resources through increased utilization of fresh water supplies, increased waste disposal requirements and the threat of pollution of

our seas. There is also the tendency towards undermining our social customs and mores. One of the greatest challenges for small countries, such as my own, is to create sustainable touristic development which, at the end of the day, produces benefits to enhance the quality of life in all our communities.

Global warming brings additional challenges to small island developing States with the increase in the number of natural disasters. The devastation and havoc that violent storms have visited on small island States in recent years would challenge the resources of large, developed nations. The Bahamas and other areas of the Caribbean are now in the thick of the season when tropical disturbances can occur at almost any time. These tropical disturbances, which sometimes grow into massive and serious hurricanes, pose a tremendous threat to the countries of our region, since the effect of these devastations is usually the widespread destruction of homes and infrastructure.

In the midst of all of this, the question is still: How will we achieve sustainable development?

Some, over the last five years, have thought that increased environmental protection would be the way to achieve that goal. However, discussions at the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development reminded representatives that, although there had been heavy emphasis over the last five years on efforts to halt environmental degradation and to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, these alone could not bring about sustainability.

We believe that sustainable development must be built on three pillars of society: environmental well-being, social harmony and economic opportunity for all citizens. Sustainable development depends on all those three conditions being in balance. Hence, it will be impossible to achieve sustainable development in societies where conditions of poverty have not been addressed, where citizens live under unacceptable social conditions and where economic opportunities are available to few.

If we have not lived up to the environmental objectives set at Rio, perhaps part of the problem lies in the fact that, in our desire to address urgent environmental concerns, we have neglected the other two pillars of a vibrant society. And if that is so, clearly we must now turn our focus, during the next five years, to bringing the world's strength and power to bear on alleviating the abject poverty in which some of our people continue to live and in equipping these persons with the tools — the education and the skills-training — to make their social and economic well-being possible.

However, another obstacle has also prevented us from realizing the goals set at Rio. Regrettably, that has been the inability of many Member States to honour commitments made at Rio. Some developed countries have met their quotas — indeed, even gone beyond their commitments in assistance to the developing world. But there are also too many examples of developed countries which have not. Nonetheless, some developing countries have taken similar steps to those taken by the Bahamas towards creating a more sustainable way of life for our people.

The commitments made in Rio in 1992 were repeated and reinforced at the Barbados Conference in 1994. Yet many small island States in the Caribbean have not received the financial assistance promised, nor has there been the transfer of technology required to get the job done.

Furthermore, even with the firmest of political will, many developing countries, particularly small island developing States, simply cannot meet their respective obligations under the two Rio Conventions on biological diversity and climate change without considerable assistance.

If we fail to meet the challenges we accepted in Rio and have come here to renew; if we do not reverse clear trends towards environmental disaster; and if we do not address the daunting problems of the poor, the world's biological clock may well strike the midnight hour very soon. It is, after all, the poorest among us who depend most immediately and directly upon biological resources for their survival. We, the Governments of the world, are committed to bringing them immediate and direct relief. Therefore, we must guarantee them environmental integrity — and that, of course, means clear water, healthy crops free of chemical pollution, and fresh fish from clean seas.

For these reasons, this special session of the General Assembly is not merely a timely event. Its success is vital to the well-being of mankind. To the critics of progress to date, we offer the old adage: It is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. Clearly, it is very much better to have tried and succeeded, even partially. We acknowledge that we have not succeeded in

all that we set out to do, but we have made a very good start.

The Bahamas joins the other nations represented in this Assembly in rededicating ourselves to those principles of sustainable development we embraced so boldly and resolutely in Rio. For us to do otherwise is unthinkable. But this time, let us resolve to get the job done.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security of the Bahamas for his statement.

*The Honourable Frank H. Watson, MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security of the Bahamas, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Minister of the Environment and Development Cooperation of Finland.

*Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Minister of the Environment and Development Cooperation of Finland, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Haavisto** (Finland): I have the pleasure, on behalf of Finland, to address this special session. As a minister for both environment and development cooperation, and representing a green party, I feel strongly, as members can imagine, about the problems and prospects we face here this week. My deep personal involvement and concern is shared by my Government.

First, I wish to support the statement made by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union (EU). He emphasized that development is sustainable only if we fight poverty, promote employment, foster social integration, implement democratic governance and respect all human rights. The EU initiatives on fresh water, energy and eco-efficiency are of great importance to our future work. In addition, I would like to underline some issues of specific concern for my country and, I believe, for the world community as a whole.

The social dimension of sustainable development has gained importance since Rio. Public health care, environmental health issues and social security contribute to the social and human capital, and consequently to the national wealth.

The gender issue is also a key element in sustainability. A commitment to the empowerment of women and their full participation are preconditions of sustainability. Empowerment and full participation require visible "mainstreaming" of a gender perspective into all policies and plans, as was stated at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women.

As members are aware, Finland is a forest country. Therefore, we see sustainable forest management as a key element for sustainable development. Finland is committed to the prompt implementation of the outcome of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. National forest programmes are a significant instrument to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Criteria and indicators are an essential policy instrument for defining the concept of sustainable forest management, and therefore they should be further developed and implemented. Finland also believes that voluntary, non-discriminatory and internationally accepted forest certification is a useful tool to promote the sustainable management of forests.

Furthermore, a long-term commitment to combat deforestation and forest degradation is essential. Finland believes that a legally binding instrument on all types of forests would soundly complement existing agreements and conventions. The agreement should cover ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects. All relevant stakeholders should be able to participate in the process in a transparent and cooperative manner. Finland is convinced that the negotiating process in itself constitutes a meaningful way to build consensus and commitment. We have heard two opposite opinions: some say that the forest convention would be only a so-called chainsaw convention, allowing overlogging. Others are afraid that it will prevent all use of forests. We believe that there is a third way: sustainable forestry.

We are also ready to increase our official development assistance in supporting the efforts of developing countries for sustainable forest management and combating desertification.

A major issue that also needs to be highlighted is climate change and our common efforts in combating it. Finland is committed to the European Union's goals regarding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This special session should also send a firm message to the Kyoto Conference. Finland welcomes the concept of joint implementation as one effective way to fight climate change. This concept offers possibilities and advantages for both developing and developed countries. Through joint implementation projects,

developing countries and countries with economies in transition can arrive at new solutions and obtain eco-efficient technologies.

New scientific evidence verifies the alarming state of the Arctic environment. Because of the global circulation of the atmosphere and oceans, the Arctic is a sink of pollutants from industrial regions. The most alarming risks to human health are posed by organic pollutants. Broad international effort is required to alleviate the currently increasing environmental problems of the Arctic. In this process, the role of indigenous people is central.

Finland is also participating in the preparation of Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea region. We find cooperation at the regional level extremely fruitful, as it addresses directly the specific concerns of the people living in these regions.

Finland is committed to a high level of environmental protection. Therefore we consider it of utmost importance to integrate trade and environmental policy-making, both at the national and international levels, to support sustainable development. This is essential, especially in view of the fast pace of globalization, including a further liberalization of trade, services and investments. In this context there is also a need to take into account the concerns of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries and countries with economies in transition. More and more countries are adopting stricter environmental norms, and therefore the World Trade Organization (WTO), among others, has to ensure that lower environmental standards are not used as a tool for unfair trade.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without adequate international institutional arrangements. In my view, there are two broad areas of institutional issues that need to be urgently tackled: how to unify the global environmental governance system and how to strengthen operational activities in order to mobilize the entire United Nations system for the implementation of Agenda 21.

The environment deserves institutional arrangements that guarantee legislation and monitoring. This can be achieved only with a unified system integrating all dimensions of environmental management, with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the main pillar.

Turning to United Nations operational activities, better coordination or even integration, both at country and headquarters levels, is the key to their improved performance for sustainable development. In some countries the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is already playing a major role in promoting national environmental action plans.

I should like to see UNDP as the main source of financing for actual environmental projects, with an increasing commitment to Agenda 21 and its objectives.

Finland also finds an adequate replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) crucial. We for our part are willing to increase our contribution to the Fund, subject to satisfactory burden-sharing.

In addition to the United Nations system, the role of international development financing institutions in the implementation of the global Agenda is crucial.

The financing of Agenda 21 in developing countries requires both domestic and external resources as well as public and private resources. Finland is ready to share this responsibility. In a policy decision taken last year, our Government also pledged to use an increased percentage of future official development assistance funds on the environmental sector and for supporting the objectives of Agenda 21. This also includes more resources for the transfer of technology. We are also ready to support the developing countries in the fulfilment of their global environmental commitments.

These past five years have proved that the underlying philosophy of the Brundtland Commission's report is still valid. Environment and development are even more closely linked. What concerns us is that most indicators prove that the state of the global environment is worsening. A better future depends on genuine political will. To make sure that in Rio + 10 we can witness a turning point, we have to multiply our efforts.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister of the Environment and Development Cooperation of Finland for his statement.

*Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Minister of the Environment and Development Cooperation of Finland, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Costas Petrides, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment of Cyprus.

*Mr. Costas Petrides, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment of Cyprus was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Petrides** (Cyprus): In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, we were at a critical crossroads. We still are.

Our environment continues to be treated as dispensable, a consumer good ripe for exploitation. Unsustainable lifestyles have not changed, the incessant drive for plenty has not ceased, excessive demands on natural resources have not slackened. Promised fundamental changes have not materialized. Access of those countries in need to financial and technological resources and know-how has still not been secured, even adequately. Poverty and associated problems prevail. The political process is still largely alienated from people and their legitimate aspirations.

Naturally, we cannot ignore the positive side of the equation. The need for change has spread everywhere. The end of the cold war, the adoption of the new agreement under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the entry into force of the Conventions on biological diversity, climate change and desertification present us with new opportunities. New partnerships have emerged. Concern for the environment has come out of the twilight directly into the hands of political leaders. Grass-roots initiatives are proliferating. People are not content to go on being marginalized.

The accomplishments and the potential of what has been achieved so far cannot be overlooked. But neither can we deny that we have not yet replaced unequal growth with sustainable development. Thus far only the periphery has been smoothed. We need to deliver more, much more.

All definitions of sustainable development encompass collective intergenerational and intragenerational responsibility, as well as national, regional and international responsibility. At the national level, all our countries should endorse in practice, with strong and lasting political commitment, the principles of sustainable development. This can be secured only through a system characterized by the appropriate setting of priorities, credibility, implementability, high pluralism, accountability, long-term views and reduced dependence on the transfer of institutions. Above all, the collective will of the free market should not be allowed to continue to breed problems.

In Cyprus, we are guided by Rio's Agenda 21 and by our active participation in the evolution of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Agenda 21 for the Mediterranean region adopted at Tunis, and the Council of Europe's Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. Among other actions, we have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and have decided to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. An environmental action plan has been adopted. The main thrust of my country's latest strategic development plan is the further incorporation of sustainability into social and economic policies, and a new comprehensive bill for the protection of the environment has been drafted.

At the regional level, the great civilizations that have flourished around the shores of the Mediterranean have interacted from the dawn of history, closely living in a complex web. We have gradually established forums for dialogue and instruments for action. Cyprus is honoured to be associated in partnership with the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme, and with the European Union's Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and Environment for Europe processes. Such initiatives offer shining examples of what can be accomplished when countries decide to shoulder their responsibilities as the stewards of the environment that they are.

In this context and as adopted by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, our regional priorities in the realm of development policy relate mainly to coastal area management, awareness and participation, water management and the integration of environmental concerns upstream. We have also reaffirmed our commitment to reinforcing the role of institutions responsible for the environment and for sustainable development.

At the international level, we all need to work together to secure a political transition leading to complementarity of objectives, which is essential in the search for the much needed transnational ethic of mutualism, which still eludes us. In this respect, we must never lose sight of the fact that environment and fundamental human rights are indivisible. The right to an environment of high quality has, after all, been recognized as a human right in the General Assembly's Declaration on the Right to Development, resolution 41/128. The concept of sustainable development has also linked the right to permanent sovereignty over one's natural wealth and resources with the right to a secure environment, free from external security threats, as declared *inter alia* in the

communiqué of Heads of State of the Alliance of Small Island States at the 1994 Barbados summit.

Cyprus is well aware of how aggression and occupation can bring immense human suffering, destruction of economic resources and irreparable damage to the environment, which have direct effects on the enjoyment of practically all human rights. We are gravely concerned about plans for the construction of a coastal nuclear power plant in an area of high seismic risk opposite our northern coast.

We also need to place much greater emphasis on the social, cultural and human dimensions of sustainable development, with priority emphasis on poverty eradication and on urbanization and its associated problems. This we cannot achieve without effectively tackling international inequalities and securing appropriate technical and financial support, at the bilateral and multilateral levels, both from outside and from internal sources. We should also harness the international economic system and put it to the service of the real needs of people, and should reconcile trade competitiveness with environmental protection within the framework of the World Trade Organization.

As regards international institutional structures, our basic consideration should be to reach consensus on a system effective enough to mediate strategically between competing and conflicting demands, ensure intersectoral coordination, assist in the clearer definition of responsibilities and the roles of every actor, establish linkages so that policies are properly integrated and common purposes are agreed upon, and provide for an effective mechanism for sharing information.

We may have created high expectations at Rio but, in retrospect, this was not a mistake. Rio has indeed changed the coordinates of our final destination, and this special session is giving a new boost to the processes we set in motion at Rio. Through a frank international dialogue of assent, we have identified the problems, the weaknesses and the drawbacks. Now, conflicts and hard choices are being tackled and, although this is not easy, we must reconcile differing concerns. Conventional wisdom would perhaps dictate that we cannot alter overnight the course of history and economy and that, unfortunately, change can only come slowly. However, we need to abandon this business-as-usual attitude, as it can offer no consolation to the billions of our people who demand action now and who call upon us to accept at last the fundamental truth that, as it appears, is not yet evident to everyone: by not listening to the silent cries of a deteriorating environment, we are destroying humanity; by not listening to the cries of children dying of hunger, we are losing our humanity.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment of Cyprus for his statement.

*Mr. Costas Petrides, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment of Cyprus, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Vilisoni Cagimaivei, Minister of Urban Development, Housing and the Environment of Fiji.

*The Honourable Vilisoni Cagimaivei, Minister of Urban Development, Housing and the Environment of Fiji, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Cagimaivei** (Fiji): Today, five years after the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and three years after the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the implementation of Agenda 21, particularly for small island developing countries like Fiji, continues to be a formidable challenge. The perspectives and realities faced by each country are different but, as far as Fiji is concerned, we believe that economic and social development and the environment are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development.

My delegation fully associates itself with the position of the Alliance of Small Island States regarding the Commission on Sustainable Development's modalities for the review of the Barbados Programme of Action.

My delegation believes that economic development is the most vital component of sustainable development and overall growth. Economic development not only provides the basic foundation for social development and the better protection of the environment, but reinforces and facilitates them. As a small island developing country, we submit that economic development in developing countries can be successfully accomplished only through international cooperation in several vital areas.

Official development assistance is one such area. Such assistance helps us facilitate social development in key sectors such as health, education, communications

and basic infrastructures which can attract private investment. However, despite much-vaunted promises and undertakings, official development assistance has been declining in real terms, and this has resulted in the stagnation of the development efforts of small island developing countries. We note with concern from the latest report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that in 1996 the ratio of official development assistance to gross national product was the lowest recorded since the United Nations established a goal of 0.7 per cent nearly 30 years ago. Nevertheless, we wish to express deep appreciation to those countries that reached the United Nations target in 1996 — Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands — and we urge the other Member countries to attain the United Nations target.

Trade is an area that is vital to the sustainable-development efforts of small island developing countries. Globalization has become the buzzword for all countries, developed and developing alike. In view of the increasing interdependence of the economies of developing and developed countries, the integration of our economy into the world economy is a fact that we have to live with. Although this new arrangement aims to increase global wealth, small developing countries such as Fiji are wary of the expected benefits, because such changes require us to adapt to the pace of globalization, whether we like it or not. They require us to make the necessary structural adjustments, including public and private sector reforms, financing the external debt burden and looking into the possibilities of penetrating foreign markets for international trade. There will never be equality of opportunity between vastly unequal trading partners, and the ultimate consequence is that the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

Pacific, African and Caribbean countries will be placed at an even greater disadvantage with the loss of trade preferences, which have buoyed our export trade, after the expiry of the Lomé Convention in the year 2000. These are, among others, some of the obstacles that we must overcome in order to achieve sustainable development.

Another vital area of economic development is business and industrial development, facilitated by foreign private investment. Such development widens employment opportunities and increases social benefits to the population. Foreign private investment to stimulate industrial development in small island developing countries has stagnated in recent years, with debilitating effects on sustainable development.

Notwithstanding the many challenges and difficulties we face in implementing Agenda 21, I would like to categorically state that my country is committed to the Rio Declaration and the Barbados Programme of Action. Allow me to provide a brief rundown of some of the programmes that we have prepared and are implementing in order to attain some of the goals of Agenda 21. In terms of social development, my Government has set a high priority on the advancement of people in commercial activities. In this regard, the Government is guided by a number of strategies to strengthen the education system and to assist people in owning business ventures, obtaining capital and developing entrepreneurial skills. My Government is committed to reducing poverty by providing income-earning opportunities to the poor, ensuring that they have access to job opportunities and self-employment, and also by providing safety nets for those who continue to experience severe deprivation.

As far as the forestry sector is concerned, a number of initiatives taken before or following the 1992 Earth Summit have been aimed at sustainable forest use. Fiji's Forestry Sector Review and its incorporation into the Fiji National Forestry Action Plan have been accomplished, and project proposals have been implemented or are currently being executed. The main projects include the re-inventory of the Indigenous Forests — Fiji German Forestry Project; the development and implementation of a Fiji logging code of practice; the establishment of a regional code of logging conduct; membership in the International Tropical Timber Organization; and the Fiji Forest Resources Tactical Planning Project, which is funded with Australian aid.

Fisheries constitute one of the valuable resources in the South Pacific region, and Fiji calls on this forum, among others, to ensure the conservation and management of fish stocks at national, regional and international levels. According to studies conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, most stocks of commercially valuable fish are now running low, and this is a cause of concern to our Government, as our livelihood is dependent on fisheries and other marine resources. My Government is fully aware of commercial fishing operations that exceed the ocean's ecological limits and unravel the intricate web of marine life that makes the sea a vital part of the life support system not only of our country but of the Earth.

My Government is currently in the process of drafting a piece of integrated, consolidated environmental and resource-management legislation known as the

Sustainable Development Bill. Finalizing this Bill is one of our main priorities if development in Fiji is to be effective and sustainable in the long term. In addition, it has recently prescribed that henceforth all new investment projects will require environmental impact assessments before being approved.

Fiji's accession to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action indicates our recognition of the importance of involving women as full participants in sustainable development. The work that is currently being undertaken includes micro-enterprise projects to support women's income-earning activities, promoting savings, improving standards of living and creating opportunities for self-employment for women so that they may integrate well into the commercial sector.

We acknowledge the financial assistance made available to us in the implementation of national projects on sustainable development, such as the Capacity 21 initiative, by the Global Environment Facility of the United Nations Development Programme, the European Union, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Asian Development Bank. Fiji, however, feels that a serious reassessment of the role and priorities of some of those organizations in assisting small island developing States like Fiji needs to be undertaken.

In conclusion, may I say here that there is still a lot more to be done to operationalize and realize fully the outcome of Agenda 21. We call for international cooperation, including the assistance of United Nations agencies, because without technical and financial assistance our efforts will lead to a lopsided development which can have serious ramifications for the present and future generations of Fiji. The way forward for my country is to consolidate the existing sustainable-development efforts and to increase public awareness through education and other means so that the implementation of Agenda 21 will become a reality that will benefit all the people.

Indeed, we still have a long way to go on this journey, and I hope that our presence at this special session and our sharing the experience of others will give us some innovative ways to tackle the problems of sustainable development.

**The Acting President**: I thank the Minister of Urban Development, Housing and the Environment of Fiji for his statement.

*The Honourable Vilisoni Cagimaivei, Minister of Urban Development, Housing and the Environment of Fiji, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tawfiq Kreishan, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment and Member of Parliament of Jordan.

*Mr. Tawfiq Kreishan, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment and Member of Parliament of Jordan, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Kreishan** (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Permit me first to convey to the Assembly the greetings of His Majesty King Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who would very much have liked to be here at this important international gathering but was not able to do so due to his previous commitments. I would also like to convey the greetings of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Ben Talal and best wishes for the success of this historic special session, which is aimed at charting a strategic approach to the protection of the world's environment.

Permit me also to express my sincere thanks to the United Nations system and to the countries and organizations participating here for the great efforts they made in preparation for this historic special session, which is being held at a time of increasing environmental problems and pressures on the natural resources of many countries as they endeavour to achieve development and to improve their quality of life.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development laid the foundation for a global partnership to put peoples and nations on the road to sustainable development. It concluded that the environment, the economy and development could not be viewed as separate elements. The Rio Declaration issued by the Conference emphasized basic principles to be adopted by countries as a basis for their future decisions and policies regarding development in order to have international participation with the aim of establishing a link between the quality of the environment and a healthy economy for all the people of the world. Agenda 21 is truly a prime mover of all the components of sustainable development. The countries that participated in the Rio Conference agreed on how to realize development in the future on social and environmental bases for sustainability.

Jordan has been promoting sustainable development for a long time and has gone a long way in dealing with environmental concerns and increasing public awareness of the environment and of the importance of preserving its basic components. The Government of Jordan has sought to strengthen the Kingdom's relations with other countries, as well as with international and regional organizations in matters related to the preservation of the environment and to accession to the three conventions that resulted from Earth Summit: those dealing with climate change, biological diversity and combating desertification.

The Government of Jordan has taken several measures reflecting decisions of the Rio Conference including. Most important among these is the provision of a legal framework for the protection of the environment and the institutionalization of environmental action through the establishment of a public institution for environmental protection, which would have full power to ensure the protection of all components of the environment, the conservation of resources and pollution control. We have also established a Higher Council for the Protection of the Environment, which will be concerned with environmental policies ensuring a linkage between environmental issues and development. All this is being done under legislation enacted by the Jordanian Parliament in 1995, which reflected a comprehensive and contemporary vision.

Having listened to the statements made by other Heads of delegations, I for my part value very highly the proposal made by the heads of industrialized countries, which expresses full awareness of, and a responsible attitude towards, the conservation and protection of the environment. I would also like to note the positive tone of the statements made by those leaders on the protection of the environment, not only from the perspective of the industrialized countries, but from a world perspective that included the environmental problems faced by the developing countries.

In this context, I wonder how the developing countries can participate in solving environmental problems and consider them a priority in their national programmes while they languish under the burden of indebtedness. The extent of this indebtedness is such that it absorbs most of their development revenue. Therefore, in the name of my Government, I call upon the international community and the creditor countries in particular to consider seriously ways and means to help debtor countries to end or alleviate their indebtedness so that they can participate effectively in dealing with global issues such as the environment.

Jordan, which has for the last five decades suffered from forced migrations, has carried out environmental projects and has ratified and implemented the three international Conventions resulting from the 1992 Rio Conference. The following are some examples of Jordan's actions.

First, a national study on biological diversity and planning has been carried out in order to develop a strategy and work plan for biological diversity and to increase and expand nature reserves in Jordan. Secondly, a national study on greenhouse gases has been carried out with a view to adopting a national policy for limiting emissions of such gases. Thirdly, a national committee has been formed to combat desertification with a view to developing a national strategy on desertification. Fourthly, a national Agenda 21 has been established, based on the national plan of action for the environment. Fifthly, Higher Coordination Committees for women's non-governmental organizations have been established to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, with a view to involving women in sustainable development. Sixthly, a strategy has been adopted to combat poverty and unemployment, and a social security package has been developed to that end.

Jordan is striving ceaselessly at the national, regional and international levels to strengthen the ties of friendship and peace among the peoples of the world. Jordan's efforts in this regard have culminated in the conclusion of several regional agreements for the present and future benefit of the peoples of the region.

At the pan-Arab level, Jordan abides by the document on inter-Arab action on sustainable development which was adopted by the Arab Council of Ministers responsible for the environment on 15 October 1992, following the Rio Conference. We in Jordan consider this document as a full constitution and a comprehensive record of inter-Arab action, particularly with regard to cooperation programmes with the United Nations Environment Programme such as the programmes to combat desertification, increase the size of the green area, control industrial pollution, provide environmental education, awareness and information in the Arab homeland, ensure cooperation on endangered species (biological diversity) and establish an integrated environmental information system.

Jordan did not stop at the steps which I have just enumerated in the area of the environment. We in Jordan have an ambitious programme providing for further action

on the environment, which gives priority to the following projects.

First, we have looked at overall planning to preserve the area of agricultural land in order to combat desertification and carry out a proposed integrated project for the creation of a green belt in the Kingdom.

Secondly, we are reviewing the demographic distribution in the Kingdom by establishing appropriate industrial towns to encourage reverse migration from urban to rural areas. Thirdly, we are carrying out a study to establish a waste-recycling plant to convert organic matter into fertilizer and build a central incinerator with special environmental features enabling it to dispose of chemical waste.

Meeting here today, we recognize the historic responsibility that we universally share towards future generations to preserve a clean global environment. This conservation measure can be achieved through the implementation of the Rio principles, which include globalization and international partnership.

We in Jordan believe that we have done our full share. We have committed ourselves to the implementation of the Rio principles and rules despite our shortage of natural resources and the pressure on the resources available. We uphold Jordan's commitment to do its share as a world partner in sustainable development. We are a democratic country that respects all human rights and freedoms.

In this regard, we call on all our other partners to shoulder their responsibilities, and we declare our willingness to cooperate with all countries and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, and with the United Nations specialized agencies within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles and rules of international law and national sovereignty to achieve sustainable development in order to provide a better life for present and future generations.

Once more I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation and my best wishes for the success for this conference in the interest of our peoples and future generations.

**The Acting President**: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I would like to appeal to the remaining speakers to respect the limit of seven minutes for their statement.

I thank the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment and Member of Parliament of Jordan for his statement.

*Mr. Tawfiq Kreishan, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment and Member of Parliament of Jordan, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable George W. Odlum, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Saint Lucia.

*The Honourable George W. Odlum, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Saint Lucia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Odlum** (Saint Lucia): I stand before you today as a recycled product. The people of Saint Lucia in recent elections have recycled me from ambassadorial material to foreign ministerial material. I hope that this, in some curious way, can assure you of the commitment of my country to the principles of sustainable development.

In embarking on this review and appraisal of Agenda 21, it is vital that this distinguished forum realize that the environmental chain is as strong as its weakest link. The spirit of Rio haunts us like a bad dream when we appreciate the dilemma of small countries struggling to achieve developmental goals under the severe constraints of sustainable development and environmental integrity.

In the face of these problems we have strong initiatives by a major power which push our fragile banana industry into fiercer competition by way of a World Trade Organization ruling, and these very pressures force our producers to extend their cultivation to forest reserves and water sources in a bid to achieve economies of scale. It is here that the spirit of Rio mocks us in the lack of fulfilment of the provision of new and additional resources to finance sustainable development. Developed countries must live up to the commitment of implementing the United Nations target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product to official development assistance. In addition to this, we have been long on talk and short on implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

We are acutely aware that, as with the concept of sovereignty, our size is no impediment to a full

commitment to responsibility for guaranteeing the environmental integrity of the planet which we will pass on to the next generation. Despite the recurring problems of natural disasters — hurricanes, storms, the flooding of our river banks and the threatening rise in the sea level — we have attempted to preserve the spirit of Rio in a number of ways. We have signed an agreement with the United Nations Environment Programme for an integrated coastal zone management project for the southeast coast of the island. The object of this agreement is to prepare an integrated management plan for the sustainable use of that coast. Similarly, we have put mechanisms in place to reduce the incidence of beach-sand mining. A complete management plan and zoning system referred to as the Soufriere Marine Management Area has been undertaken with all resource users and management authorities. Together with this, a comprehensive package of revised fisheries regulations was brought into effect in 1994 further to control the use of reef resources.

Saint Lucia has sought, through ratification of the Basel Convention in 1993, to join the global initiative to control the transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous wastes. We remain committed to the development and implementation of appropriate regulatory measures as outlined in the Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States.

These early efforts to implement Agenda 21 are now reinforced by the new dispensation with a heightened sense of the burden which falls on the shoulders of people-oriented Governments. As a new Government, we interpret our overwhelming mandate to include not only the youth of this generation, but the planet-life of children of future generations. We see food, water and shelter as the elemental and basic needs of the people of the Earth. They have a right to these necessities. We must resist the arrogance of seeing these as favours bestowed by benevolent Governments.

The people of the Caribbean are now forced to make a transition from their dependence on primary production, with its hopelessly declining terms of trade, to a more diversified source of revenues. Manufacturing, tourism and agro-industry are the new areas of diversification. All of these carry their own threats of pollution and degradation, but we must explore every possible avenue for improving the quality of life of our people. We must examine these options with a scrupulous eye towards protecting our ecosystem and our environment. In achieving this, it is imperative that we embark on an elaborate system of environmental education which would interpret the quality of life in a broad humanistic sense that would embrace future generations.

Saint Lucia and other small island developing countries are playing their part in furthering the goals of Agenda 21. We now urge more developed States to provide the necessary support to assist our transition to a more sustainable modern economy. The transition is bedeviled by the new phenomenon of globalization, which exposes our brittle and vulnerable economies to the full blast of open competition. The spectre of poverty and unemployment still menaces our efforts at balanced development and the insensitivity of multinational corporations makes no allowance for our fledgling status.

It is this desperate condition which forces small island States to welcome proposals for oil refineries and bulk-storage stations, even with the looming prospect of oil spills. It is this desperation which directs our banana producers into the illegal practice of cultivating marijuana plants and other illegal substances. We need the solid support of this Assembly in fighting the attempts to decimate our banana trade by rulings of the World Trade Organization.

It is sometimes said that "the death of every man diminishes me". In a similar vein, we must uphold the dictum that "the survival of every man, woman and child enhances me".

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Saint Lucia for his statement.

*The Honourable George W. Odlum, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Rodney Williams, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda.

*The Honourable Rodney Williams, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Williams** (Antigua and Barbuda): It was amidst considerable fanfare, unbounded hope, unshackled optimism and unrestrained promise for a better future that our Heads of State and Governments gathered in that tropical paradise of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, some five

years ago this month to adopt a global compact, known as Agenda 21, which contained strategies for preventing environmental degradation and establishing a basis for a sustainable way of life on the planet.

Nevertheless, some five years after that seminal event, if we were to ask people of the world the following question —

> "From a sustainable development point of view, are you better off than you were five years ago?" —

the overwhelming majority, I am afraid to say, would answer with a resounding "no!" This in turn leads to the questions that we all need to ask: Exactly where did we go wrong? And what do we intend to do during the next five years to promote economic and social development while simultaneously preserving and protecting the global environment?

The people of the world demand and should be given answers to these questions. We are to be held accountable for failing to deliver on the promises that were made at Rio. For it was in this most hospitable of places that we were supposed to have established a turning point in international negotiations on issues of environment and development; where we struck an equitable balance between the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations; where we laid the foundation for a global partnership between developed and developing countries, as well as between Governments and sectors of civil society, based on a common understanding of shared needs and interests.

As Governments, though, we have collectively failed to capitalize on the promise and accomplishments of Rio. We need to educate our respective nations about sustainable development. Nine out of ten people in both the developed and developing world have no idea what the term means and how it affects them. Nine out of ten also have little if any appreciation of why recognition and action are necessary. People have not been made aware that they are partners, and they must be partners in this process of sustainable development. We need to do more and to help them to learn about this process through education via the mass media in the schools, in political debates and in public presentations.

Cognizant of the fact that the purpose of the special session is not to renegotiate Agenda 21, it is nevertheless clear to me that we need to reemphasize the global compact that brought about the Earth Summit. All concerned need to pledge here and now that the commitments made at Rio will be honoured in a timely way; that the pursuit of "business as usual" is most unlikely to result in sustainable development in the near future; and that increased investment in and empowerment of our people, especially in basic education and health care, will allow them to creatively address imminent challenges.

The industrialized countries must take the lead in changing their patterns of production and consumption to save the global environment and assist developing countries such as mine in our efforts to meet our peoples' basic needs, eradicate poverty and achieve economic growth.

These tasks are by no means easy and have been compounded further by the fact that official development assistance, a crucial part of the Rio agreements, has fallen from 0.33 per cent in 1992 to 0.27 per cent in 1995. This is well below the widely accepted target of 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product of the industrialized countries that is needed for development assistance.

A reversal in this downward trend is imperative if we are to implement fully the provisions of Agenda 21, where it is recognized that while the bulk of the resources for sustainable development must come from a country's own domestic coffers, external assistance in the form of official development assistance constitutes a very important pillar. Contributions from both sources allow us to build on the partnership that provides us with a sustainable development "win-win" situation in which not only the planet benefits, but also recipient countries and donor countries to an even greater extent.

Recipient countries have indicated their readiness to do more with less and mobilize their domestic resources and private capital to finance their fair share of the costs of national sustainable development. But the precipitous fall in official development assistance has shifted the burden for sustainable development unfairly to the developing countries, destroying in the process the equitable balance that was struck at Rio. Private capital, foreign direct investment and portfolio investment, once touted as the panacea for sustainable development in developing countries, have shown only selective benefits to some countries and have bypassed the vast majority, particularly those in Africa. A combination of private capital flows, foreign direct investment and debt relief as part of an overall financial package may be a solution.

In addition to these global concerns, allow me to highlight some of the other areas which my country, Antigua and Barbuda, seeks to address in partnership with the international community and which, in addition to commitments in the area of climate change, biodiversity and drought and desertification, I believe should be given some priority.

Antigua and Barbuda, as members are no doubt aware, has 365 white sandy beaches. Its azure blue skies and aquamarine waters, I am proud to say, provide an ideal vacation destination. But sea, sun and sand notwithstanding, the primary reason why the issue of freshwater resources is an important one for the sustainable development of our twin-island State is clearly seen. While many of the problems related to water quantity and quality can be dealt with at the local level, there is a need for an intergovernmental dialogue on principles and means for a global commitment on the sustainability of freshwater resources. There is also an urgent need for international investment in cost-effective technologies for conservation and the safe reuse of water, along with transfers of technology and resources to countries such as ours, which have a low capacity for coping with water scarcity and pollution.

As dependent as we are on our coastal and marine resources, the implementation of the programme of action adopted by the General Assembly in December 1995, aimed at reducing land-based sources of marine pollution caused by sewage, oil, nutrients and litter, and the cessation of activities that physically alter and destroy our marine habitats, is important for our sustainable development. The protection of our coral reefs is also of paramount importance.

In recognizing that an integrated approach to sustainable development is necessary since political, economic, social and environmental issues are closely interlinked, we cannot overlook the integral role that women can and should play in the quest for sustainable development. In Rio, women were considered a "major group" whose involvement was necessary to achieve sustainable development. Hence, for us, mainstreaming women's concerns and participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all development and management of environmental programmes to ensure that they do benefit, is necessary for sustainable development. In this regard, we call on the multilateral and bilateral donors to increase their support for women's organizations in countries such as Antigua and Barbuda to enable them to play an active role in sustainable development.

Many of the problems that our country faces are endemic to small island developing States. In this regard, we welcome the Commission on Sustainable Development's decision calling on the General Assembly to convene a two-day special session in 1999 to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, adopted at the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. I hope that the international community will use the opportunity afforded by that special session to implement fully the provisions of the Barbados Programme of Action.

I also welcome the designation of the United Nations Environment Programme as the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment, and commend the recent efforts at reforming its governance to enable it to become the leading authority in that field.

Finally, I again reiterate that we need to do more here than just reaffirm the commitments of Rio and the provisions of Agenda 21. If we are to pay more than mere lip service, we must act now to address the means of implementation, the transfer to developing countries of substantially new and additional financial resources and environmentally sound technology on concessional and grant terms. In this regard, we commend the efforts now under way to ensure that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is adequately replenished for the next three years.

Time is of the essence. If we are to achieve the sustainable development goals of Rio at all levels, we must collectively pledge to act right this minute, not next week, not in 2002, but today. The time for sustainable action is now.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda for his statement.

*The Honourable Rodney Williams, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to appeal again to speakers to respect the limit of seven minutes for their statements. Otherwise, it will not be possible for all of the speakers inscribed on the list to take the floor during this meeting.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Soubanh Srithirath, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

*Mr. Soubanh Srithirath, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Srithirath** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*interpretation from French*): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in June 1992 at Rio de Janeiro, gave birth to major hopes. In emphasizing the inadequacy of traditional approaches to development based on economic and social inequalities between the countries of the North and the South, developed and developing countries for the first time committed themselves to uniting their efforts and their political will in a global partnership based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, a principle that can ensure a healthy future for the planet.

Since the entry into force of the agreements and commitments adopted in Rio, many important steps have been taken in many parts of the world. The concept of sustainable development has been incorporated into relevant national development policies and programmes. However, we should note that the progress achieved since Rio has by no means given rise to optimism. The commitment made by the developed countries at the Earth Summit to voluntarily achieve the goal of allocating at least 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official assistance to developing countries has not been met either in quantity or in real terms. Similarly, we are far from seeing the transfer of environmentally sound technology to developing countries on concessional and preferential terms. In this context, we believe that commitments to new and additional financial resources as well as environmentally sound technology transfer are in our common and mutual interest, and are necessary. These commitments should be reaffirmed if developing countries are to practice sustainable development.

The Lao delegation attaches great importance to the goal of eradicating poverty through decisive national action, international assistance and cooperation. Nonetheless, we feel that all the efforts towards this goal require a higher level of action and consultation on the part of all countries. I have already mentioned some key issues such as finance, technology transfer and the eradication of poverty; these have been the subject of debate for several years. But practical results remain few. As we are at the mid-term of the goals set at Rio, it is surely imperative for us once again to demonstrate our common will by committing ourselves fully to the fulfilment of the Rio Declaration, so as to move forward by lending fresh momentum to the process of consensus-building and by moving it forward into an operational and action-oriented phase.

While emphasizing the need to take a balanced and integrated approach to environment and development issues raised at the Rio Conference, the Lao Government is fully conscious of its own commitments and has adopted a national environmental action plan which focuses on the development of an institutional framework for the conservation of resources in both urban and rural areas. There has been real progress towards this goal in a number of areas, most notably through the enactment of several important laws governing the use of our land, water, forestry and mining resources. Capacity-building in environmental management, the strengthening of the role of our Science, Technology and Environment Organization in major provinces, the establishment of an inter-ministerial working group on environment and the adoption of a decree on environmental protection are important measures undertaken by the Lao Government with a view to the full implementation of our action plan.

Moreover, Laos has been an active participant in the drafting of the Tropical Forest Action Plan and in the work of the Mekong River Commission, which deals with the sustainable development and appropriate management of water and related resources in the lower Mekong basin. Most recently, my country became a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, which are among the major outcomes of the Rio process.

In view of the stage of my country's development and the living conditions of the Lao people, my Government has identified eight priority programmes that have been incorporated into our National Socio-economic Development Plan to the year 2000, which aims at improving the well-being of our people, promoting economic growth and sustainable development and enabling my country to shed the designation of least-developed country by the year 2020. The play acknowledges that we must press ahead with the structural transformation of the economy, with capacity-building and with infrastructure development.

Wealth in natural resources and hydro-electricity represents our development potential; clearly these are resources that should be exploited to provide sustainable sources of direct incomes for our people. In this context, a major hydro-power development project is currently under public discussion, a process whose goal it is to make all information available, to take into account international standards, to mitigate impact on the environment and to maximize benefits in order to serve our people, especially the poorest among them.

Rio gave rise to many hopes and expectations. However, much remains to be done because of the many problems and difficulties ahead. The political will of all players will be the decisive factor in achieving what we all desire: implementation of the Rio Declaration adopted in 1992. For its part, the Lao People's Democratic Republic would like to reiterate its firm commitment to this process. It will do everything possible to make its modest contribution to helping the world community transform the planet into a greener place in which to live.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for his statement.

*Mr. Soubanh Srithirath, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. David Peleg, Chairman of the Delegation of Israel.

*Mr. David Peleg, Chairman of the Delegation of Israel, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Peleg** (Israel): Israel is a small, dry country blessed with neither large dimensions, natural resources nor plentiful water resources. During the 50 years since our establishment, Israel has learned from experience the importance of controlled development that preserves the environment and its wealth. This recognition guided us for many years before the concept of sustainable development was universally adopted, and has allowed us to be considered among the developed countries of the world.

Through its own initiative, and prior to the international effort to enact so-called forest principles, Israel set forestation as the cornerstone of its efforts to cultivate and rehabilitate its land, to develop its arid areas, to combat deforestation, to preserve native species and even to influence weather patterns. Indeed, Israel has dedicated 20 per cent of its land to the development of national parks and nature reserves. This broad and multifaceted activity was not motivated by commercial considerations, but instead derived from a commitment to the environment and to improving the quality of life for its inhabitants.

Israel has attached its signature to the three global environment treaties that emerged from the Rio summit, and continues to integrate and apply the principles therein within its national policies and institutions. Israel is similarly committed to implementing the vast majority of environmental treaties that have been adopted by the international community. Israel is actively engaged in translating the principles of sustainable development enshrined in Agenda 21 into its comprehensive national strategy for sustainable development.

Yet we believe that the advancement of Agenda 21 and the environmental treaties is not dependent solely on their implementation through national programmes. Unfettered international cooperation is a critical element of any truly sustainable development, for the problems — and indeed their solutions — transcend borders and other artificial barriers imposed by man.

It is with this conviction that Israel has acted for over 40 years to share, with all, its unique experience of a variety of subjects concerning sustainable development, including the utilization of solar energy and the re-use and recycling of urban and industrial waste water, and to learn from the experience of others. Last year alone, over 4,000 trainees from around the globe participated in our annual courses, conducted in nine different languages. Furthermore, responding to the global threat of desertification and its exacerbation by climate change, loss of biodiversity and deforestation, Israel has recently inaugurated an International School for Desert Studies. The aim of the school is to promote human resource development and build the capacity of developing countries affected by desertification and the loss of dry-land biodiversity.

It is only natural, however, that we should direct our own limited resources to the development of our regional and subregional environment. The eyes of our Mediterranean country turn to the nations with which we share a common shore. Israel is an active partner in research and joint projects to develop and preserve the Mediterranean and its environment and to protect it from pollution, within the framework of the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan —

recently under Moroccan leadership — which has shown over the last 20 years that regional cooperation is the most effective tool for protecting our common resources.

Within this context we are engaged in both the sustainable development of our coastline and a trilateral project with Egypt and Cyprus designed to help protect the eastern Mediterranean from oil pollution. We hope that the European-driven Barcelona process will also promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean region. As members of the Economic Commission for Europe, we shall also continue to support the need to direct its efforts towards both the Mediterranean and economies in transition.

To our regret, we have yet to tap the full potential for cooperation with our closest neighbours. The Middle East peace process is designed to provide the political platform without which it will be impossible to establish any kind of cooperative development in our region, while at the same time providing the very means for that cooperation through the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the talks. However, notwithstanding the admirable mobilization of the international community and the United Nations agencies in this regard, we have yet to succeed in convincing some of our neighbours of the necessity for joint efforts in implementing Agenda 21. The multilateral track of the Middle East peace process, designed to identify and define joint developmental needs while mobilizing national, regional and international resources, is not functioning effectively due to the refusal of some of our neighbours to participate therein and the intent of others to use this track as a platform for pressuring Israel.

Environmental issues figure prominently on all tracks of the peace process in order that we may strive to utilize and exploit in a sustainable manner the natural resources in the area for the benefit of all concerned parties. We must understand that peace and the environment are interdependent. The move towards cooperative relations and mutual trust between the peoples of the region is of benefit to the environment. Peace will make it possible to establish regional frameworks, to preserve joint resources and to create new ones.

The Bahrain declaration on an environmental code of conduct for Middle Eastern countries, adopted by the majority of the region's States in the multilateral working group on the environment, represents a good basis for advancing regional cooperation in the field. We have also been able to establish some cooperation with our neighbours in fields such as the joint struggle against desertification within the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification. The recently completed joint research project between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians in the most arid sections of the Dead Sea and the Arava area represents a good example, worthy of repeating, of true collaboration and the potential that exists for development throughout the entire subregion.

In the final analysis, the hope that we may be able to advance Agenda 21 in our region rests with the peoples of the region, who recognize that potential cooperation offers the only chance for a better future. This recognition can be brought to fruition if the leaders of the region are sensitive to the desires of their people. We therefore believe that greater openness and a spirit of accommodation and reconciliation will form the basis and, indeed, provide a guarantee of joint progress towards the objectives of sustainable development, which transcend narrower political considerations. At the same time, the significance of Agenda 21 is lost if development projects address themselves solely to natural and other resources without also taking into account the human habitat, which must be based, first and foremost, on respect for democracy, human rights and social justice.

We must ensure that our endeavours will maximize the possibility for global cooperation that will exist as a result of the excellent spirit of cooperation emanating from this very important gathering. In that spirit, Israel initiated an international meeting of experts — the first of its kind — to identify synergy among all the Rio Conventions and establish methods of integrated approach and implementation for these instruments. This meeting was convened last March in Sde Boker, in the heart of the Negev desert, at the Institute for Desert Research at Ben-Gurion University. The gathering was organized in accordance with the global policy of the Commission on Sustainable Development and with the cooperation and contribution of the United Nations Development Programme, as well as the Governments of Japan, Denmark and Norway.

If we could learn to take advantage of the synergy among the various instruments, it would be of great significance in the advancement of the objectives of Agenda 21 of the national and international levels. It would also help achieve the vital international coordination among the conventions, the international agencies and other actors involved. We expect the process initiated in Sde Boker to become an important tool in promoting sustainable development for all, particularly the developing world.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Israel for his statement.

*Mr. David Peleg, Chairman of the delegation of Israel, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** The next speaker on the list is Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

*Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Ricupero** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development): Globalization was in its infancy when more than 100 world leaders met in Rio de Janeiro at the first Earth Summit. The message from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was clear: globalization should not be confined to the selective and exclusive unification of markets. Nothing, after all, could be more global and important than the future of the planet itself. Thus, if we wished rich and poor to share a common but differentiated responsibility for the planet, we had to meet the precondition for that: to share, on an equitable basis, the access to finance, markets and technology.

Over the past five years, despite undeniable but modest progress, we have failed to meet expectations in critical areas of the sustainable development equation. Having chaired the group on finance at UNCED, I share the disappointment expressed by speakers who have preceded me.

Finance, export-led growth, investment and technology remain essential components of sustainability. Unless we deal with economic questions of development as a priority, sustainable development will remain an illusion for the great majority.

Since Rio, globalization and liberalization have accentuated the close relationship between trade, investment, technology and sustainable development and the need for their integrated treatment. Improved resource efficiency, good environmental performance and income generation depend increasingly on trade expansion, investment promotion and technological dynamism. Equitable opportunities for trade, access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies and incentives for investment are key ingredients for sustainable development.

Today's world is different from the world of 1992. The dynamics of a global economy have changed some of the premises on which Agenda 21 was built. The spectacular growth of foreign investment exemplifies this. Only seven years ago, official development assistance exceeded foreign direct investment to developing countries by over 30 per cent. Today the balance has changed dramatically. Foreign investment exceeds official development assistance by over 300 per cent. As a result, the role of markets has moved to centre stage.

Left to themselves, however, markets cannot solve the problems of the global commons, a reality recognized by the emergence of international environmental regimes. Cooperation is the only way to address market deficiencies and failures, often by using market mechanisms based on incentives and preferences.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has been working to identify positive measures to use trade and investment as tools to promote a better environment. We have also been developing practical ideas to help make the conventions on climate change and biodiversity operational in economic terms in the first case by creating market mechanisms to reduce carbon dioxide levels and generate new financial resources for developing countries, and in the second case by working with Governments, private industry and local and indigenous communities to help create a viable market through which developing countries will earn fair revenues from their genetic resources.

However, we have to complement market mechanisms with policies designed to manage and steer the process in the right direction. Globalization itself, as we know, is the result of deliberate policy choices. Also, leaders today do have a choice. Markets are not an end in themselves, but instruments in the hands of society. As such, they must be coupled with a purpose. No purpose could be more compelling than to create hope and opportunity for the millions of people who are excluded from the global marketplace and who lack the prerequisites to compete on a level playing field.

We must acknowledge that we have not yet found the key to reconcile the creative forces of private entrepreneurship with the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations. Recent initiatives for Africa may prove a first and encouraging example of how political will can mobilize market forces in the service of sustainable development, providing incentives for growth, trade and investment.

The stakes are high. Fifty years ago, Albert Camus remarked that for the first time in history mankind had made collective suicide a distinct possibility. Nuclear war is now perhaps less of a threat than in the days of Camus, and, fortunately, the world did not end with a bang. It is, however, the cause of this and future generations to ensure that the world will not now end with a whimper and that life shall not perish from the Earth because of our selfish insouciance. This is the ultimate challenge of true globalization with a human face: to bring about the unification of the space for the action and cooperation of human beings.

As we proceed to the first global event on development in the next millennium — UNCTAD's tenth conference, to be held in Thailand in the year 2000 — our organization renews its commitment to that end.

**The Acting President:** I thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for his statement.

*Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** The next speaker on the list is Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

*Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Mayor** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization): We have not done what we undertook to do at the Earth Summit in Rio five years ago. The question before this meeting is whether we are prepared to take the difficult decisions that will lead to a rapid and radical change in our energy habits, in patterns of urban transport and in the resources and expertise made available at local and national levels for water conservation and development, soil analysis, mitigation of marine pollution and waste treatment. No environmental improvement will take place without skilful people everywhere, from the littlest to the biggest municipalities. Dozens of thousands of ecojobs must be created.

With this conviction in mind, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Cousteau Society created the UNESCO-Cousteau chairs in ecotechnology five years ago. Commandant Jacques-Yves Cousteau has just passed away. He will remain among us forever with his commitment and his vision. I wish to pay tribute to one of the world's most distinguished champions of environmental protection, one of the greatest examples of farsightedness and devotion to environmental issues.

Are we prepared to address the issues of unsustainable production and consumption, to tackle the problem of poverty at the root of so many other ills in our asymmetric world, to practice a more generous sharing of knowledge and resources of all kinds, not the least financial ones? Or are we content to continue buying and selling, chopping and burning as before? If this is the case we shall meet here again in five years and nothing will have changed.

National commitments are required to meet the targets of Agenda 21 and the conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification. These commitments must be sustained. They cannot be dependent on the results of elections. Parliaments — the voice of the people — must be the guarantors of the pledges made by Governments on behalf of their nations. Because the problems concerned are very complex in nature, scientists must join with Governments in the formulation of policies for sustainable development. Only in this way — through the involvement of all major groups in society, including non-governmental organizations — will our children and our children's children come into their rightful inheritance.

The key to sustainable, self-reliant development is education, education that reaches out to all members of society through new modalities and new technologies in order to provide genuine life-long learning opportunities for all. Through its Education for All programme, UNESCO and its United Nations partners, including the World Bank, are engaged in a worldwide campaign to make basic education accessible to all, with special emphasis on women and girls, who make up 65 per cent of the total illiterate population and whose empowerment is crucial to reducing fertility rates.

Are we prepared, at the national and international levels, to make the investments required? We must invest in the environment, in education. We must invest in education because the good news is that today we can say that particularly through education and capacity-building, world population growth has slowed from a peak of 2.1 per cent a year in the early sixties to 1.5 per cent in 1996.

In all countries we must be ready to reshape education so as to promote attitudes and behaviour conducive to a culture of sustainability. For its part, in 1994 UNESCO launched an international initiative called Educating for a Sustainable Future, incorporating environmental and population education, and has acted as the United Nations task manager on sustainable development in the areas of education and science.

Fifty years ago our Organization was instrumental in the creation of the World Conservation Union. Since that time it has played a leading role with its United Nations partners and the scientific community in the development of international scientific programmes that address environmental and developmental problems in an integrated manner. In particular, I would like to mention here the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which carries out important work on climate change and ocean health and is at the forefront of the development of the Global Ocean Observing System and UNESCO's international scientific programmes concerned with fresh water and with man and the biosphere. Several new interdisciplinary initiatives have been developed by our Organization in response to the meeting in Rio in 1992, notably the World Solar Programme 1996-2005, which promotes all forms of renewable energy, to which President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and others, such as the Prime Minister of Italy, Mr. Prodi, have already referred.

Let me just add a word about another domain with which UNESCO is concerned. All human development is embedded in culture. Whether we regard culture as a means to development or as the supreme arbiter of what our development goals should be, development, and sustainable development in particular, must always have a cultural dimension.

UNESCO is strongly committed to continuing to play its part with the broadest possible range of partners inside and outside the United Nations system to implement Agenda 21 and the agreements reached at this Earth Summit + 5. We await the far-sighted decisions and investments that will maximize our possibilities of doing so. The awareness created by Rio must now, at all levels, from that of all people in their everyday lives to that of the decision makers, lead to the commitment and involvement of the media, parliaments, the non-governmental organizations and youth associations, in particular. Let us mobilize the world's conscience in order to avoid further postponements and in order to see, at the dawn of a new century, the light of hope that the world deserves.

**The Acting President**: I thank the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for his statement.

*Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President**: The next speaker on the list is Mr. Eugenio Clariond Reyes of the International Chamber of Commerce, speaking on behalf of the Business and Industry Major Group.

*Mr. Eugenio Clariond Reyes, International Chamber of Commerce, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Clariond Reyes** (International Chamber of Commerce): I would first like to pay tribute to the memory of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, pioneer of modern environmentalism, who committed his life to promoting an enhanced knowledge and understanding of the oceans.

It is a great honour for me to address this forum on behalf of business and industry. Five years ago, in response to Maurice Strong's invitation, a group of businessmen presented our position at the Rio Conference. Until then, business had not played a significant role in the activities of the sustainable-development agenda.

Today, five years later, there has been an enormous change. Our segment of society has shown great advances in its commitment to sustainability, and it is participating for two main reasons.

First, we developed the concept of eco-efficiency at the Rio meeting. This means that waste and pollution do not make sense from a business perspective. We should aim to eliminate those evils for business and environmental reasons. Financial results improve when we become eco-efficient. Competitiveness relies on resource productivity. Today, there is ample testimony that being a good citizen is analogous with being a good businessman.

Additionally, business is goal-oriented. Chapter 30 of Agenda 21 provides us with guidelines for meeting the goals and expectations set for business. I will review some of them.

In order to promote cleaner production, Agenda 21 recommends that we recognize environmental

management as one of the highest corporate priorities. This has become increasingly the case in the corporate world. We still need a strategy for involving smaller companies, particularly in developing countries.

It recommends that we strengthen partnerships to implement the principles of sustainable development. We at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development have been creating regional groups and making new and innovative agreements with academia. I stand here today not only as a businessman but also as a promoter of sustainable development at the Monterrey Institute of Technology.

It recommends that we use economic instruments where the prices of goods and services reflect the environmental cost. There is an urgent need for a change in signals. Today, the tax burden is on labour and the creation of wealth. At the same time, agricultural, water and fuel subsidies are enormous. Our societies will end up with growing structural unemployment along with a tremendous waste of water, fuel and natural resources. This nonsense has to stop, even if it is politically difficult.

It also recommends that we adopt and report on codes of conduct on environmental practice.

Today, the application of standard 14,000 of the International Organization for Standardization is starting to make a difference. We should stress the use of those and other standards.

Contrasting these goals of Agenda 21 with business performance, one concludes that there has been progress. But we still have a long way to go. I am optimistic that we have what it takes to face our responsibility and secure a sustainable future.

Two principles that I consider essential in life are that we should celebrate accomplishments, since they are important for nurturing our drive and enthusiasm, and that we must never succumb, but keep searching for a better future.

Five years after Rio, business has accomplishments to celebrate, but we also have a great and tremendous challenge that does not call just for cleaner production. When I think of that, as a man, a father and a businessman, I am overwhelmed by the responsibility that pursuing this dream implies.

The world's population is still growing at 1.48 per cent annually. Today there are 400 million more people than there were in the year of the Rio meeting. Not only do these people need to eat, they also require education and training. They need housing, jobs and hope for a better future. Most population growth takes place in less educated and less developed countries, where there is the least possibility of financial resources being available. In my country, Mexico, 60 per cent of the population is below 23 years of age. We have difficulties meeting this sector's educational needs, which are essential for a better future.

We should not delay making intelligent decisions about controlling population growth. In some religions, preventing pregnancy is a sin and whoever practices birth control, they say, will end up in hell. What in the world are they talking about? There is no worse condemnation than how they are living now — lacking the most essential human needs; living in poverty, pollution and hunger; living with illness and in ignorance. They are already in hell — how much worse off can they be?

Until now, implementing Agenda 21 has been the responsibility of environmental ministries in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and non-OECD countries. But the fiscal, economic and trade instruments and resources are in the hands of other entities, financial ministries or economic cabinets, which generally exclude environmental authorities. The environmental authorities have the responsibility, but they do not have the means to deliver.

The responsibility of securing sustainable development also has to be the job of the Government's economic authorities. Any programme that does not correct this contradiction will be worthless.

**The Acting President:** I thank Mr. Eugenio Clariond Reyes of the International Chamber of Commerce for his statement.

*Mr. Eugenio Clariond Reyes of the International Chamber of Commerce was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** The next speaker on the list is Mr. James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank.

*Mr. James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**Mr. Wolfensohn** (World Bank): I must first of all thank the representatives present for delaying their lunch. I am deeply appreciative.

Five years ago in Rio, Governments from around the world came together and committed themselves to a more equitable and sustainable world. Five years later, the picture is mixed. As an institution dedicated to reducing poverty, we at the Bank are more aware than ever of the continuing link between the degrading environment and the poverty still afflicting so many of the world's people. Less than a quarter of the world's people consume three quarters of its raw materials, while 3 billion people still live on less than $2 a day.

At the global level, we have not achieved our objectives, but at the national level we have seen a positive shift towards environmental responsibility, with a third of our client countries implementing national environmental strategies. On a positive side, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has become an effective financing mechanism to address global environmental issues. It must be replenished generously this year.

The World Bank, as an implementing agency for the GEF and Montreal Protocol, and in its own lending portfolio, has worked to help countries fulfil their global commitments, but we are committed to doing more. Today, I want to be quite specific and outline five areas in which I think the Bank can make a real difference.

The first is climate change. Progress has been inadequate. Only three countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are likely to reach their non-binding commitments under the Convention for the year 2000. It is absolutely essential that, at the Kyoto meeting later this year, industrial countries make strong commitments to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that these commitments be implemented.

Continued global warming is in nobody's interest and it hurts the poor more than anybody. I see the Bank's role in climate change as providing an opportunity to developing countries to benefit from the huge investments the OECD must make. I believe that progress would be facilitated if joint implementation with crediting were permitted under the Convention. I know this is a sensitive issue, but I believe that there could be gains for both the global environment and for our client countries. Under a voluntary mechanism, which need not imply aggregate emission limitations for developing countries, tens of billions of dollars could be saved annually by 2010.

The savings have got to be shared equitably between our client countries and the OECD countries. Developing countries can apply these savings as they choose to facilitate expanded development financing and technology transfer. These savings must also result in larger binding commitments to reduce emissions on the part of industrial companies. We are prepared to launch a carbon investment fund should parties to the Convention find this helpful. That would make these gains a reality. In addition, to promote renewable energy, we are exploring a broader strategic partnership with GEF and other financiers that would move us towards a large-scale programme of renewable energy investments.

Secondly, on biodiversity, we simply will not succeed unless environmental values can be reflected in the marketplace. We are going to create a series of market transformation initiatives with the non-governmental organizations, particularly in the areas of forest and marine products, and try to get things to a truly sustainable base. As a first step, I am inviting CEOs of some of the world's leading forest products companies and conservation organizations to join forces with the Bank to arrest the current unacceptable rate of forest degradation.

I have also announced earlier today a global alliance between the Bank and the World Wildlife Fund to help arrest the loss of forests globally. We are committed to working together, and with others, towards achieving by the year 2000 a representative network of protected areas amounting to at least 10 per cent of each of the world's forest types. And in Bank client countries, we will strive to achieve an additional 50 million hectares of forest ecosystems under strict conservation and an additional 200 million hectares of tropical, temperate and boreal forests under genuinely sustainable management with independent certification, by the year 2005. This is a realistic target.

Thirdly, let me turn to ozone depletion. It is a bright spot, but even here more needs to be done. A major remaining challenge is to eliminate chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other ozone-depleting substance production in Russia. This accounts for nearly half of the CFC production worldwide and, through illegal smuggling to other countries, is threatening to undermine the effectiveness of the Montreal Protocol. The Bank, in collaboration with Russian CFC producers and

Governments, has developed a programme to eliminate CFC production in Russia by 2000. We now need to complete the necessary fund raising and it is very much in sight.

Fourthly, addressing desertification is essential for poverty reduction and food security in developing countries. We are already the largest financier of drylands investment, but we are going to do more. We have earmarked on a revitalized rural strategy in which the links between poverty and land degradation are given special emphasis. We are working with agricultural techniques to stem the spread of further desertification and to restore degraded land. We offer to assist countries that are interested in establishing mechanisms for mobilizing financing and coordinating implementation.

Fifthly, in the water crisis, 20 countries now are water scarce or stressed and the number will double by the year 2020. Developing countries will need to invest about $600 billion over the next decade and we are committing $35 billion during this period, following the Dublin principles. The Global Water Partnership gives us an opportunity to solve water issues in a more holistic way and we are committed to following this and to continuing to work with the regional seas programmes.

In all these areas, the World Bank will work in partnership with others. We will expand our work with the private sector to promote practical business opportunities. We will join others to promote higher standards of environmental and social performance for private and public investment. As an example, we have joined with the World Conservation Union in launching an International Advisory Commission on Large Dams.

In our own home at the Bank, we are consolidating the supervision of our environmental and social activities across the entire World Bank Group, including the International Finance Corporation and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. We are establishing a stronger system of compliance monitoring for environmental policies within our own operations.

The growing global problems of climate change, biodiversity, forest loss, desertification and water are seriously threatening the long-term development of many of our client countries, with the poor paying the highest price. These are not fringe activities. They are central to meeting human needs and reducing poverty. I wholeheartedly commit the Bank to working as effectively as we can in equitable approaches to global environmental issues. We are going to move quickly. These are five ideas that we are going to pursue. They are practical and we look forward to working with you.

**The Acting President:** I thank the President of the World Bank for his statement.

*Mr. James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I have before me a trophy awarded to the General Assembly at this special session by Rotary International, which five years ago at Rio began a worldwide marathon. I hasten to observe that it is not the same person who has been running throughout these five years. It has been run on two continents thus far: Antarctica and, now, Asia. The trophy relates to what we are doing here, and reflects Rotary International's love for the environment and deep belief in the endurance of the human spirit.

*The meeting rose at 1.50 p.m.*